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HAZEL COMBE;

OR,

THE GOLDEN RULE.



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THE GOLDEN RULE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "RECOMMENDED TO MERCY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HAZEL COMBE;

OR,

THE GOLDEN RULE.

CHAPTER I.

JANETTA PAYS A VISIT.

SIR MATTHEW and the Rector watched, with very different feelings, the rather singular courtship between Johnnie and his betrothed. To the former, the renewal of Bessie's visits, and the charming influence of her pleasant voice and frank sweet smile, were sources of daily and unmingled delight; for Sir Matthew was one of those privileged beings, whose eyes rarely look below the surface, and who, when *that* is smooth, ignore the fact that dangerous ground-swells and reefs of hidden rocks may lie beneath the sun-lit stream.

The Rector, however, was (as I think the reader must by this time suspect) of a nature very differently constituted; and whereas his

friend was one who failed to see the evils which existed, *he*, on the contrary, was prone—and that, it may be, in part from the dark shadows thrown on all things by his past experience—to forestall in his imagination the sorrows which were to come.

The happiness also of his dear adopted child had ever been to him a thing so precious, that the man did not exist whom he deemed worthy to replace him in that tender guardianship; still he had felt and hoped for Bessie that she would have her dream of joy—short though he knew it would be; but even of *that* he had begun to doubt, as, in this new phase of her existence, he watched his country maiden narrowly.

It wanted little more than a week to the wedding; for six months of the mourning for Lady Fendall had nearly expired, and Sir Matthew had fixed upon that period as the time when his mother's last expressed wishes should be carried out.

The aged lady had been conveyed to her last home when the winter's snows were on the ground, so that it was summer again now, and Bessie sat beneath the verandah at her work, with the favourite flowers, which she had so soon to leave, all blossoming near her, and the

birds warbling their last evening song ere they folded their wings for the night.

She was far handsomer now than in the days when Matthew Fendall coarsely compared her budding beauty with his cousin's riper charms, and when he vowed he liked that girl the best who was least difficult to please. But improved though she was in loveliness, I doubt much whether the Dragoon would have found her better suited to his taste than heretofore, for she was still what he called "distant" to all except the few with whom long association had rendered her intimate, nor did she possess a single grain of the appetising spice of *coquetterie*, which was so essential an element in the flirtations that the soldier loved.

She had passed rather a lonely day; for Johnnie had gone to London, in order to be in readiness for an anticipated "division," and her guardian (for so she still called him, although her twenty-fourth birthday was fast approaching) had been absent for several hours with Sir Matthew, on business connected with a church which was about to be built on a distant portion of the estate.

Still, lonely though she was, the day would not have passed unpleasantly to Bessie, had she

not, early in the afternoon, been surprised by a visit from her old acquaintance, Janetta Western, who, immediately on her entrance, announced her intention of spending an hour at the Rectory.

“For Mamma and Barbara have driven on to the Pencliffes; and as I do not want to be present when poor old Mesty dies in his harness, I spared him my weight going up the hill; besides, it was so awfully hot and dusty in the little seat behind. I wish Barbara would marry, and then I should have a front place.”

There was some sense of fun in Janetta's nature, which had hitherto been of use in preserving her from exhibiting any strongly marked symptoms of disappointment at her incipient old-maidism. She was two years younger than her sister, also, which was a consolatory circumstance, to say nothing of her being, in her own opinion, infinitely *mieux conservée*; but, in spite of these healing convictions, it was difficult to forget the mortifying fact that she wanted but four years of thirty, and that—often as she had, in conversations with her female friends, implied the contrary—she had never yet experienced the pleasant sensation of listening to an offer of marriage.

When the news of their cousin Johnnie's engagement reached Westerham Abbey, the indignation of the female portion of the family was extreme; for, taking into consideration the established truth that Matthew was "not a marrying man," it followed, as a matter of course, that Johnnie was a *parti* to be prized, and that the despised and mysteriously-born Bessie might eventually become mistress of Hazel Combe.

"The odious scheming girl!" exclaimed Barbara, tossing poor Sir Matthew's simple letter of announcement across the breakfast-table. "I always knew what she was about—hanging over Lady Fendall, and going into mourning for her, and toadying Sir Matthew. I wonder she had the face to do it!"

"She has a face for anything or any station," said Mr. Western, as he prepared to leave the room; "for a handsomer or a better girl than Bessie Forester does not exist, and I shall ride over to Combe Hatton and tell her so."

"How ridiculous your father is!" exclaimed Mrs. Western, fanning herself violently, as was her custom when she was angry and excited. "And how blind Sir Matthew must have been!"

“He wanted it all along, I am sure; and, besides, I don’t think that Bessie schemed so *very* much,” remarked Janetta, who would have been rather fond of Miss Forester had that young lady’s career been thoroughly unsuccessful.

But, to tell the truth, Janetta nourished at that period in her heart of hearts a lingering hope that Colonel Matthew would return and redeem some of the not very valuable pledges which, in the shape of vows of love and constancy, he had offered to her. Barbara was well aware of this little mental weakness, and it was with her a standing joke to inquire of poor Janetta (when the Indian mail came in) whether there was any news of the —— Regiment among the letters she had received; and, indeed, she sometimes went so far as to suggest that the few dried flowers and leaves which lay in a hidden corner of the deceived one’s desk should be at last considered as family property; affirming that they would form a fitting contribution to the rather ancient-smelling *pot pourri* with which the huge Indian vases in the Abbey hall were filled.

Under these circumstances it was, as will readily be believed, a dark hour to Janetta when the intelligence of Colonel Matthew’s marriage

was communicated to her. She said but little on the occasion ; and the only change noticeable, either in her habits or demeanour, lay in the sudden increase of affection which she manifested towards Bessie—an affection born of her hatred and envy of her elder cousin's wife, the which unknown lady had, according to her unexpressed belief, defrauded her of lover, husband, wealth, and station !

CHAPTER II.

BESSIE ANSWERS "AWKWARD" QUESTIONS.

"Poor Mesty must be very old," said Bessie, pityingly. "He should be allowed a run, or rather a crawl, in the park for the remainder of his days, for he has been a faithful servant, and should find his reward at last."

"So I am always saying," responded Janetta; "but Papa declares that the time for Mesty's retiring on a pension has not yet arrived, and Mamma protests that there is no money to buy another pony."

"Then suppose you all take to walking," suggested Bessie. "I conscientiously believe that it would prolong Mrs. Western's days as well as Mesty's; for——"

"Mamma is growing awfully stout, while the poor pony is nothing but skin and bone; but never mind them: I came to talk about the bridesmaids' dresses. What do you think of blue wreaths, and——"

But there is no need to follow the two girls in their all-important discussion of "red *flowers* and blue," pink dresses and white ; although—*soit dit, en passant*, and I should regret being obliged to announce the contrary fact—Bessie showed no lack of interest in the engrossing subject under debate.

The wedding was, as a matter of course, to take place at Combe Hatton ; and there was to be a complimentary arch made of evergreens, and the village school children, dressed in white, were to be provided with baskets of roses in readiness to strew the emblematical flowers on the pathway of the bride.

It afforded matter for surprise to Bessie that the minor details of the day's ceremony recurred so often to her thoughts, pushing aside the image of him who should have occupied the foremost place, and causing an undefined sensation in her mind, that she was about to stand alone—a white-robed and orange-flower-decked thing, amongst her brilliant bridesmaids : a mark for curiosity, rather than a creature to be loved and envied.

The feeling that this was the case was never more present to her than when Janetta, after passing in review all the as yet finished portions of the unpretending trousseau, turned the con-

versation, by a very natural transition, to the far less important topic of love and lovers.

"And where is Master Johnnie?" she asked. "I expected to find him at his post to-day, at all events, when he knew you would otherwise have so many solitary hours to pass."

Bessie winced a little—she always did when Janetta spoke in that half familiar, half contemptuous manner of the Member of Parliament—the intellectual and superior being who had done her, the unknown country girl, the honour to select her from amongst the countless ones who would so gratefully have linked their fates with his.

"He is in London," she answered, proudly. "He went up for the division on the —— question."

"I wonder you let him go so often," responded Janetta, with a kind of flighty gaiety, which might or might not be the cover to some ulterior designs. "You know, I suppose, that Mrs. Bradshaw—Lillias Sutton she was some twenty years ago—lives in London, and that Johnnie——"

"I don't know anything about it," broke in poor Bessie, passionately; "and I don't mind the least who lives in London, or who Mr. Fendall goes to see."

"Don't you? I should, if Mr. Fendall were *my* lover; for I have heard that he was awfully spoony once on Mrs. Bradshaw. By-the-bye, she asked Dick one day what your real name was; but, of course, he could not exactly tell her."

"My real name," repeated Bessie, in a faltering voice, and turning deadly pale—for Janetta's remark brought back to her memory certain vague suspicions concerning her birth, which, considerably as they had at one time harassed her, had of late years been entirely lulled to rest. "My *real* name? He knows it well, Janetta. My name is Fovester; and your brother might surely have burthened his memory with so short a word as that."

She tried to pass the matter off as though it were a pleasant jest; and forgot that, whilst caricaturing the lisping Dick's pronunciation of her name, she was hardening Janetta's heart against her by her mimicry of Dandy Dick's affected mode of speech.

"It is very easy to laugh," her visitor said (poor Bessie would have found it much less difficult to *cry*), "but people *do* want *sometimes* to know who girls' fathers and mothers are that they are to be connected with, and——"

"But my father and mother are both dead,"

said Bessie, whose dark eyes were now filled with tears; "and my guardian says——"

"Your guardian! Bessie, that's nonsense, to talk of a guardian at four or five and twenty. Besides, if people's parents *are* dead, they have other relations—uncles and aunts, and that kind of thing, you know. Why, if *my* father and mother were to die" (Miss Janetta certainly did not err on the side of sentiment), "I should have Uncle and Aunt Westerham"—Bessie felt this to be a palpable hit at her own want of "connections"—"and everybody would know who I was."

"They are very well aware of that as it is, I should imagine," rejoined Bessie, with a faint attempt at sarcasm, which was entirely lost upon her companion.

"And then, you know," Miss Janetta went on to remark, "that every one says——"

But "what every one says," was doomed, for the moment at least, to remain unrepeatable; and Bessie, feeling curious, agitated, and angry, was forced to put on a "company" face, for the better welcoming of Mrs. Western and Barbara, whose arrival at the Rectory gate Jane the foot-woman came at that inauspicious moment to announce.

CHAPTER III.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

WHY is it that we so seldom experience an entirely pleasurable sensation after a confidential colloquy with even the most intimate of our acquaintances? I do not speak of friends, nor of the few whose liking towards us is capable of standing that most trying test—namely, the ordeal of listening with *real* interest whilst we hold forth to them concerning *our* family, *our* fortunes, *our* opinions, and *our* prospects for the future.

That we expect such topics to be as fraught with charm for others as they are for ourselves, is the mistake often made, which, besides that it is the great first cause of that best-understood social evil called a bore, has been instrumental in the breaking off of many a promising friendship ; for the most obtuse amongst us can see the wandering look, the absent manner, and the faint but often-renewed efforts to turn the

conversation into a channel more agreeable to the listener—*videlicet*, a channel in which the latter will have some chance of repaying his egotistical friend in kind for the tedious honour he has been inflicting.

It may be thought, and that very naturally, that these not entirely original remarks may have nothing to do with Bessie Forester, and with the agitating questions put to her by her inquisitive interlocutor; but when I proceed to remark that, many a time and oft, the Rector's ward had, with patient self-abnegation, listened with seemingly enticing ears whilst Janetta poured forth a stream of girlish confidences, in which her hopes and fears, her jealousies and sore mistrusts were ever mingled, and doubtless, to herself, seemed ever new,—when, I repeat, I mention this proof of Bessie's goodness of heart and rare unselfishness of character, I think the reader will admit that to be bullied by Janetta Western was, to say the least, a little hard upon her.

"I wish she had not come," the poor girl whispered to herself; "I wish with all my heart she had not come! And something certainly had happened to put her out, for she was not nearly so affectionate as usual. And then, what did she mean about that Mrs. Bradshaw? She

could do nothing, and yet—no, I wont trouble myself to reason on such nonsense, nor will I say a word to Guardie of the things she talked of. It would only vex him—although I should like to know if I have any relations. Most people have relations, as Janetta said ; and perhaps that Mrs. Bradshaw— Pshaw ! Why do I think about her ? I'll go and see if Jane has heard of poor Dame Brad—oh, how stupid ! —Hickson, I mean ; and whether she could drink the broth we sent her.”

But courageously as Bessie strove, by occupying herself with other matters, to escape from the memory of her persecutor, the “leprous distillment” which had been poured into the pouches of her ears did its work well and surely, as was proved by the first question which, notwithstanding her good resolutions, she addressed to Mr. Santland on his return.

“Guardie,” she said,—and the while she spoke her long dark curls fell over her blushing cheek,—“Guardie, please to tell me how old Mrs. Bradshaw is ?”

“Mrs. Bradshaw?—Miss Lillias Sutton ? Ah ! I see. Thirty—forty—fifty. Why do you ask ?”

“Only that Janetta Western was here to-day,

and—" but then she stopped, blushing painfully.

"And told you that she was Johnnie's first love, eh?"

"*First* love!" repeated Bessie, sadly, and without answering his question; "*first* love! Is there, then, a second?"

He rested his head upon his hand, and one of those expressions so sad, and yet so unutterably sweet, which always went straight to Bessie's heart, stole over his face. She felt that she had pained him, although she knew not why; and, creeping close to him, she said, softly—

"Guardie, dear, don't trouble about me. It was only nonsense—only an absurd speech of Janetta Western's. She used the words you hate so, and said that Johnnie was once 'awfully spoony on Mrs. Bradshaw,' and I was curious, rather; but I don't care now—indeed I don't," she added, earnestly, as she noticed that the shadow which anxiety had spread over her guardian's countenance could not be chased away by her eager protestations.

"You *don't* care, my Bessie!" he said, affectionately, while he passed his hand soothingly over her shining hair; "you *don't* care! Would to God that I could think your words were true!

Would to God that your's, my child, were one of those unconscious minds which ask no questions of the Past and dream no dreams about the Future ! ”

“ But, Guardie, dear, I had no wish to look into the Past. I have not thought about the Future. I only wanted to be happy.”

“ *Only* to be happy ! Bessie, your aspirations are lowly placed, indeed. Only to be happy ! Why, child, you talk as though the gift you speak of hung upon every tree that grows upon life's path, and that you had but to stretch your hand and pluck it ! ”

“ No, indeed, that was not in my mind ; but I have lived—you know I have—such a calm, quiet life, that it has seemed to me I only wanted to be loved. I only wished to feel that I was all-sufficient, with my deep devotion, my unceasing care, to make the happiness of—of those around me, and——”

“ And that gabbling fool—that silly, prating jay—came and awoke you from your dream, and bade you listen to the truth ? ”

“ She did not, Guardie. She only asked me questions—only warned me that Johnnie, perhaps, might see the lady that he had loved in London ; and it made me sad, I own it did.

But I was very foolish ; I shall be wiser now, and will forget that I was silly enough to fancy he had never loved before."

For a few minutes Santland remained silent, whilst Bessie resumed her work, fancying that, by her meekly-expressed contrition, she had brought the discussion to a close. Not so, however, was a conversation to end which had been commenced by a very simple sounding question, and one which the bride elect had been far from imagining would open out so wide a field for disquisition ; for the Rector, who had during his apparently quiescent moments been aiming at a decision, said, at length, with a seriousness which almost alarmed his auditress—

" Bessie, we have lived for more than a dozen not unhappy years together, and I have scarcely seen you shed a tear, my child, through all that time. A quarter of a century, or thereabouts, my little girl, you have, as the Bible sayeth, sojourned on the earth ; and I hope that I can truly say your days have hitherto been passed in peace."

" Indeed they have, dear Guardie ; so peacefully, that even now I sometimes feel I would prefer to know the present were but a dream—a shadow cast across our tranquil happiness."

The Rector took her hands in his.

"My child," he said, "amongst the simple stories told to you in childhood, you must have learned that to awake with a bewildering shock one who is walking in his sleep, following the beckoning finger to perhaps a mortal danger, is a perilous and an unwise deed."

"I have heard so, Guardie. Better to let the poor somnambulist go on his way than warn him of his risk. I heard a history once—Jane told it to me—of a young girl who in the night must have seen stars outside her window, for she went out upon the roof with open eyes, but sleeping still, and stood upon a narrow ledge—so narrow, that no one awake and in his senses would have dared to venture on it for a moment."

"Well," said the Rector, "and what followed? Did she creep back to her bed, to dream again of fancies unremembered when she awoke? Or is there a still more likely moral to the story, namely—

'That girls will *roam* who have the power,
And they must keep who can'?"

"Oh, no! She really was asleep, poor thing, and walking slowly along the parapet, when her father, who had been absent, returned home,

and saw her white night-dress fluttering on the roof; and then—shall I tell it to you, Guardie? It is such a piteous story!”

Mr. Santland nodded his head assentingly.

“Well, he saw her there; and I don’t know whether he thought anything resembling what you said, but he shouted loudly, and asked what she was doing there; for it was bright moonlight, and he saw his daughter quite distinctly.”

“And then?”

“Then she awoke, they thought, in fear and agony; for the next moment she had fallen from the parapet, and lay a crushed and mangled creature on the ground.”

“And did she die?” asked Santland, almost in a whisper.

“No; but Jane says it would have been far better had she ceased to breathe. It happened many years ago, and she was so maimed and mutilated that she can only go about on crutches now, and her head never has been clear since the great fright her father gave her.”

“Her father, was it? But he did not rouse her gently, Bessie. He did not take her by the hand, as I do you”—(and he suited the action to the word), “nor did he warn her tenderly that her dangerous walk along a giddy height

must end, and that the star which she had gazed at was a created phantom of her brain."

He spoke with unwonted earnestness; and as he held her hands fast locked in his, Bessie, accustomed as she was to his eccentric and ever-varying moods, felt creeping over her a strange misgiving, as of some damp and sunless change, which would turn this, the summer of her days, into a dreary autumn. She would have spoken, but seemed spell-bound; and he went on, as though he were communing with himself.

"Who says the rich are to be envied? Envied, forsooth, because they can have their heart's desire!—envied because they are not as those pining ones, who long for that which is beyond their reach, and long in vain! Ah, Bessie, child, believe me, that inasmuch as they know not these uncertainties, it is the rich who are the poor; for what is a dream when it is realized, and what the rose's perfume after it has been plucked and worn?"

The girl's eyes were full of tears, as she listened to his boding words.

"Guardie," she said, "why do you talk thus sadly? Have I said anything to move you so?"

"Nothing, child. You have but asked a question, and one which I must answer."

“Guardie, I asked no question.”

“Not with your lips, my pet ; but think you that I have not seen your craving glances, child, into a hidden mystery ? You have looked upwards, but in vain, for the bright star you pined for. You have sought amongst the flowers for the one you thought would last in bloom for ever ; and the gem hidden in your casket, as above all price, has lost its dazzling lustre. Bessie, you have known me since you were a little child ; give me this credit, dear,—you know I would not call a tear in wantonness from your bright eyes, or hurt a hair upon your dear young head ; but still, I think I do my duty best—may I be forgiven if I err—by warning you that if you anchor all your hopes of happiness on Johnnie Fendall’s love, you grapple to that which has no foundation, and you will drift away to the dark shores of misery, whence there is no return.”

Bessie’s young heart (which had been beating fast before, in anticipation of what might follow), almost stood still, as she listened to her guardian’s words. And yet she felt no surprise, or scarcely any : for nameless doubts of Johnnie’s love towards her had long since risen in her heart, and little as she knew of lovers and their

fashions, a warning voice had whispered that *his* were not as other men's.

She tried to speak her answer calmly—it was a little hard, with those keen, penetrating eyes fixed searchingly upon her; nevertheless, her voice did not tremble very greatly when she said—

“You are much wiser, Guardie, dear, than I can ever hope to be; and yet I thought he loved me—only a little—just a very little, or why did his choice fall on me? Why did he wish that I should be his wife? I did not seek him; I was quite content to end my days as they had been begun—with you. And now, when I had hoped to——Ah, well, I know that I am very silly—you have often told me so—but to think that he once loved another woman as he never, never will love me, seems very hard and——”

“Bessie,” broke in the Rector, impatiently, “you mistake the cause of my uneasiness, and have jumped, with the unfortunate impulsiveness of your sex, to an entirely wrong conclusion. You have no rival, child, in any one that breathes—no rival in the flesh has ever made the man you call your lover waste his days and nights in longing for a woman's love—requiring no other heaven than her smile, and

praying for no higher boon than to be her worshipper. This is the entire devotion that men feel whose hearts, and brains, and senses all unite in one strong tide of passion, leading them, my God ! to madness and to ruin."

He covered his face with his hands, and his companion, awed by his unwonted vehemence, sat near in silence. After a few moments he recovered himself, and said more gently, but with something like a sneer, which grated harshly upon poor Bessie's ears—

"You need not be afraid of any tender errors likely to be committed by your betrothed. *He* will not sin, my child, in loving over-much. In that, at least, you will be safe. He has a theory, my poor girl, which most would find it hard to carry out in practice ; for he deems that immortality is to be won for mortal man only by the crushing down of every fleshly feeling ; and in this warfare of the flesh with the spirit the latter has, in his case, come out more than conqueror."

"I do not understand you, Guardie," Bessie said. Nor did she ; for he might almost as well have talked to her in Hebrew.

"You don't ? Ah ! you will know soon enough, when you have tasted of the tree which women desire of to make them wise. God help

you, Bessie! God help the silly ones who throw their all of happiness upon one cast, and meet the gambler's fate at last!"

"Guardie, you frighten, but you do not counsel me. I have but you to guide me: I have no mother—no kind woman friend; what would you have me do?"

"Return to your old habits and your simple duties, child, before the day has come when you will own that you take no pleasure in them. Awake at once from the insane delusion, that marriage must perforce acquaint you with that mystic thing called happiness; and remember this, that your sex's direst enemy is *thought*—its truest, surest friend, activity in the performance of the daily work that women have to do. Back then, to busy life again, my Bessie—arouse thee from thy dangerous dreams, my poor somnambulist, and, motherless though you are, and friendless——"

"Not friendless, Guardie; surely I did not say so."

"Did you not? Well, then, my ears deceived me. But, child, do you flatter yourself that you know your friends, and that your enemies are not hidden from your sight? Tut, tut, girl. Go and work—do anything but dream, and I shall

see once more upon your face the smiles that have, like summer sunshine, kept the rust from off my heart, and bade it, in its gloomiest hours, be thankful for one unmerited and priceless gift."

CHAPTER IV.

DAME HICKSON'S OPINION.

THE cause of the lively Janetta's increase of irritability was no secret to herself, and hardly one to the neighbourhood, when the gossips learned the important news that Colonel Matthew's wife was in a state of health so extremely delicate, that serious fears were felt concerning her eventual recovery.

"She has been seedy ever since she married," the Colonel wrote, "and now there is a *kid* upon the road she is worse than ever. The doctors say she wants English air, but all the women get so deuced idle in Bengal that there is no use trying to move them—so I suppose that she must just stop here, and get over it as best she can."

There was not any great amount of feeling noticeable in Colonel Fendall's letter, but then he always wrote in what Janetta called a kind of dragoonish way, which probably meant nothing,

and he might possibly, although she owned she did not think so, be very fond of *cidevant* Miss Vansittart after all. This Bessie did not believe. She saw the letter—for Sir Matthew had no secrets from her now, and she felt very sorry for the Colonel's wife, and wished she were at home amongst them to have her baby born at Hazel Combe—a healthy boy, she hoped, to gladden dear Sir Matthew's heart.

Janetta's sensations on the occasion were of a mixed and fluctuating character. Of course she could not be expected to feel any sorrow for her cousin's wife; and this being an established mental fact, she went a little further, and commenced the building of a splendid "Spanish castle." She did not count the cost in disappointed hopes, and loss of self-respect, but still went on with her aërial fabric, till she had mounted several steps upon ambition's ladder, and saw herself, in fancy, married, and the mistress of Hazel Combe.

It did not matter much to her, that the mortar with which the walls of her grand tenement were built was made from a dead woman's dust. "If she must die, she must"—this was Janetta's simple reasoning; and, as she had often said, Matthew had been *caught*, and with

regard to his loving a woman of that age (Janetta had made it her pleasure to find out all about poor Miss Vansittart), why that was quite impossible, and—but this she did not say aloud—he would marry again of course, and, &c., &c., &c., &c., *ad infinitum*.

There was but one contingency in the matter—but one dark shadowy doubt to dim the brightness of her rising sun of hope, and that doubt was the possibility that Bessie—the contemned, though tolerated one, should reap the benefit of an event from which she—Janetta—had begun to anticipate results so satisfactory. What if her cousin Matthew, on whose iron constitution the Indian climate had begun to take effect, should return a hopeless invalid to England? What if—if—anything should happen to him in that horrid country, where so many English bones were laid? Why, then, supposing he died sonless, Bessie, whom *she* had so long patronised and condescended to, would be mistress-expectant of the Combe, and—but she could not follow the odious mental vision which she had conjured up; its momentary contemplation, however, was sufficient to throw her mind, *id est* her temper, off its balance, and hence the *friendly* insinuations and suggestions by which

poor Bessie's feelings had been so signally disturbed.

Meanwhile the days followed on, and that swiftly, for their resemblance to one another was great, and the wedding-day was near at hand. Bessie had, with her wonted unquestioning docility, set herself to obey her guardian's injunctions, and, as usual, she found her account in her blind submission to his will. There were no more dreamy hours now for the young bride-elect—no questions asked of a half-doubting heart—no weakening wanderings into the wild realms of fancy ; but instead, she went, as heretofore, about her village duties, cheering the spirits of her aged pensioners by the sight of her sweet face, and listening with all her former sympathising patience to their complaints of illness, poverty, and, alas ! of *her* forgetfulness.

“I will not stay away so long again—poor thing,” she said to old Dame Hickson, the which “poor thing” was a bedridden and very peevish creature, whose excuses for ill-temper lay in her almost utter loneliness, her bodily sufferings, and her separation from the few relations whom she loved. “I will not stay away so long again ; I have been thinking too much about myself.”

"And about Master John. Aye, that's it, Miss," mumbled the old woman. "I was young once myself, and well I knows one's sweetheart does not let one have the time to move about much as one might wish."

Bessie blushed. That aged commentatrix on lovers' claims was more than purblind—and yet the young girl felt confused as she attempted to divert Dame Hickson's notice from herself. Perhaps, too, she felt, as many of us have done, that while it is agreeable to show ourselves familiar with the poor, we shrink away when they respond in kind, and drawing ourselves back, throw up the earthworks of our pride between us and our fellow dust.

"You have your plant still flourishing, I see, Dame," said Bessie, pointing to a hypericum, covered with its golden blossoms, which glistened on the window-sill. "How bright it looks! It makes almost a sunshine of its own."

"So Mr. John was a-saying, Miss; for he was here this morning. But he says, says he, 'You mustn't think, Dame, over-much about the colour and the beauty of it. It's the nature,' says he, 'of the Saint John's writ'—so he called it, 'that's good. Folks used to set a valler on the flowers,' says he, 'to keep 'em safe agin the

evil sperrits.' He thinks a great deal on the sperrits, Miss, does Mr. John; and says we have no call to care about the body. He's very wise, no doubt, but, to my thinking he's a little tedious, Miss, is Mr. John."

"He is very kind," murmured Bessie. "I had no idea that Mr. Fendall ever came to see you."

"Well, he is so koind sometimes," rejoined the shrewd old woman. "Gentlefolks do be thinking it be very good to drop in now and then to see the poor. One such a visit goes for much to get a gentleman a name for koindness. But I'd rayther have a call from you, Miss, any day, though Mr. John do be a great gentleman from the Combe; for my sperrit's often very low like, and Mr. John he isn't to say that comfortable about the body which you is, Miss Bessie—a-putting salt into the broth, and asking of me if I'd like it salter; and a-writing for me about my Samuel in the Ingies. Now, Mr. John, he says I should give over thinking of my Samuel, and only try to purify the sperrit for the world to come. I says to him, 'Surely it isn't any good to fight agin our feelings.' Then says he——"

But Bessie could remain no longer listening to the good woman's commentaries on Johnnie's

theories ; but, as she bent her steps homewards, she mused mournfully enough on Dame Hickson's corroboration of the Rector's opinions regarding her affianced husband. How many of the small pleasures, on which so much of this life's happiness depended, would, she thought, be curtailed, if not altogether destroyed, by the carrying out in her domestic life of Johnnie's ascetic principles. What—and she greatly feared that such might be the case—what if he failed to admire lovely views, and flowers—what if he did not care for music, for his dinner, for a comfortable chair—for her to talk and smile, and walk with him ? “ Ah ! ” Bessie thought, “ What will become of me, if I can do nothing for him ? Mine will be a wasted life—a life without an object—an——”

But when she had reached the Rectory gate, and passed into her flower-garden, she saw her floral favourites panting (now that the hot dry day was nearly done) for the relief which she could give them ; she saw a smile of welcome, too, upon Jane's homely face, and then, remembering what her good, true friend had said, she hurried for her watering-pot, tended the flowers herself, and saying a few merry words to Jane, she felt that all of us, in what sphere soe'er our

fortunes may have cast us, possess the power of giving pleasure to some living thing.

And yet—for all her wise resolves, and self-denying philosophy, Bessie, as she lay upon her bed that night, endeavoured to banish from her memory the important fact that she was going to be married.

CHAPTER V.

THE RECTOR'S REMORSE.

THE analysis of Johnnie's feelings at this period of his life would have been a difficult task, even for the one being—namely, himself—who enjoyed the doubtful privilege of looking into the component parts of his intellectual man.

That he showed no lover-like *empressement*, and manifested few of the symptoms which mark the presence of an expectant bridegroom, may appear strange to the many among my readers who have experienced the tender passion, and to the few who know of it by hearsay only. But let those who marvel at an apathy so unusual, look around them for examples of the great evil wrought by long-continued mental concentration—concentration too, on one point, and that point—*self*, and I am inclined to believe that Johnnie Fendall's case will cease to be considered as altogether an exceptional one.

For many a long year—from his boyhood even, he had reasoned when others would have *felt*; and had sought with a morbid and dangerous curiosity to dive into the hidden mysteries of the future, at an age when the present possesses for most of us its strongest charms.

“Johnnie is by nature cold in temperament,” the Rector had averred to Bessie; but even whilst he said the words, his conscience—that hydra-headed accuser—whispered that he was in some sort answerable for the evil he deplored.

Could he—so he reflected—have looked forward to this hour, there should have been, in so far as he could have been instrumental in effecting it, a different training for the mind which had been found soft as wax to receive, and hard as marble to retain its early, and alas! its most perilous impressions.

“Shirly was a true prophet,” he sadly murmured to himself. “But he did not initiate me sufficiently into the mysteries of physiological science which his anatomical studies had revealed to him. Had I only known, in the days when Johnnie in his freshman’s rooms at college was panting for the wisdom which is not all divine—that the human brain grows with the body’s growth—I should have offered to his mental

palate safer and less highly spiced food. God knows, however, that I did not mean to injure him! I thought him little fitted—did I really think so?—for a country parson's life, and so I turned him loose amongst those dabblers in new and mind-disturbing sciences; little dreaming—Pshaw! why did not Shirly warn me then, that the unanalysable substance called the brain increases in its volume fifty per cent. at least between the times of infancy and adolescence? But, not guessing this, was the fault only mine? I was the cause that Fendall spent in all-exciting thought, and in the society of over-learned men, the time that should have been consumed in healthy quiet. He told me, Shirly did, that the poor lad—he said he was still a child—should have his mental regimen more kindly cared for; and I—God! how we are punished for our selfish acts!—threw him into that reasoning company of philosophic dreamers, and have but myself to blame for all the direful consequences which ensued. My pretty Bessie!—my trusting, gentle girl!—what can I do for thee but hope the best, the while I feel with pangs of keen remorse that had I delegated the duty which had devolved upon me into safer, truer hands, Johnnie Fendall would probably at this moment

be talking pretty nonsense to his mistress, instead of wondering whether language were the reason or the consequence of our ceasing to be monkeys."

The wedding ceremony about to be performed in Combe Hatton church was, according to Sir Matthew's wish, to be conducted with the "strictest privacy," for the good man could not forget how short a time had passed since his mother's honoured remains had been laid beneath the chancel pavement, and he seemed still to hear in a merry marriage bell the dismal echo of a passing funeral toll.

"I cannot understand my father," Johnnie said to Mr. Santland, on the night before the wedding, "for were I as sure as he is that the good whom we have loved on earth are certain to enjoy a future state of being, I should feel no morbid sensitiveness about their ashes; nor grieve, as he will do, that we must perforce walk over them to-morrow. He believes—I know he does in his inmost heart—that his mother's spirit watches near us; or why was he so anxious to fulfil her wishes? He believes that she, a disembodied inhabitant of an unseen world, can bear about her the memory of his last filial kiss—his last look of venerating love. Ah! If I had such

a heart-supporting conviction, [how altered a sojourn would this world seem to me, but instead—”

“ You never cease to remember the melancholy fact that—”

“ Man is made of his own grave, and—”

“ You forget that individuals have been found so mad as to doat upon the dust you speak of. You forget that to-morrow is your wedding-day, and,” added Santland, almost passionately, “ that to-morrow the happiness of another—and that other the gentlest and most loving of created beings—will be placed within your power.”

“ I forget nothing,” responded Johnnie, seriously; “ and fervently do I hope that neither you nor your—your ward may ever have cause to regret the trust reposed in me. As far as Bessie’s happiness depends on me and on my exertions for her welfare, you may believe that it is safe; but there may be other influences over which I can have no control. There is that boy, Santland—how often I have regretted that a fear of being considered over-careful of my own interests prevented my giving such advice to my father as would have kept Myles Fendall at a distance; for, believe me, that there is the making of a dangerous man in that young lad. Watch

him at the ceremony to-morrow—listen to his words, and mark his countenance afterwards, and I think you will agree with me that—”

“The poor young fellow’s motto is, or ought to be ‘Everyone for himself,’ ” broke in Santland ; “and ought we to wonder that he has found sometimes the art to *hide* the mind’s construction by *his words*. For who so friendless and so self-dependent as a nameless child ? ”

CHAPTER VI.

MYLES FENDALL'S CHILDHOOD.

As Myles Fendall increased in years, it became evident to those who, like the Rector of Combe Hatton, made the study of mankind an interesting pastime, that the lad was possessed of by no means a commonplace character ; and, moreover, a close observer could perceive that he was one of those individuals concerning whom widely different opinions were likely to be formed ; for Myles was endowed by nature with the useful capacity for adapting himself, his tone of conversation, and his views, on all touched-on subjects, to the peculiar characters of those with whom he chanced to come in contact.

It might be a curious, although not altogether an agreeable, task, to trace to their source many of the seemingly slight causes which, in his early life, tended to form the character of the peculiar being I am about to describe, but as many of my readers would probably consider

this as a superfluous work, I shall mention but a few of the circumstances which—humanly speaking—made of a tolerably sensitive and a not naturally unamiable child, a young man prematurely old, and devoid of every charm which candour and the pleasant freshness of early youth not unfrequently lend to the boy over whom eighteen summers have not yet passed.

During what might be termed his infant years, Myles remained under the care of a clergyman's widow, who had been strongly recommended to Sir Matthew as a fitting person with whom to entrust his grandson ; and, taking it on the whole, the experiment had not utterly failed, since the time which Myles spent with Mrs. Mason might be considered as the happiest of the little fellow's boyhood ; for, although the worthy lady often punished him with causeless severity, her alternations of agreeable petting were not unfrequent, seeing that the instructress's errors proceeded as much from the heart as from the head, and both were in their turn liable to variation.

There can be little doubt of the melancholy fact that Myles was initiated into the first easy rudiments of lying long before he was removed from Mrs. Mason's juvenile establishment ; for

he was an apt scholar in the science which is coeval with the gift of language ; and, indeed, for that matter, most of the little boys reared in that necropolis of intelligence (Santland's name for a lady's preparatory school), could have taken a satisfactory degree, for their time of life, in the useful art of tergiversation.

It was at Laburnum Lodge, too, that Myles first learned the truth, in English, that *Divitiæ virum faciunt*. Nay, so fully, even at the early age of six, were his ideas on the value of money developed, that when, at that important period of life, his allowance of one penny per week was doubled, his expenditure in the luxuries of gingerbread and marbles was observed not to increase in proportion ; and it was reported by creditable witnesses that Myles, the money-lover, kept, in some safe and hidden place, the savings of his pocket-money.

There were no holidays—if the going to what is called *home* means holidays—for little Myles ; but he had two friends who came to see him frequently, and those two friends were good Sir Matthew and his dear Aunt Mary. A week seldom passed without a visit from his mother's sister to the worse than orphaned boy. And when she came, how joyously he sprang into her

arms, and with what warmth he kissed the round, fresh, honest face, that smiled on his so fondly ! For Aunt Mary's affection was trusted in by him as only children trust ; and instinctively the little fellow knew that, through all time and change, *her* love would never fail him.

Myles was seven years old when he was placed in the seminary for young gentlemen, where he soon learned (and that not in the most delicate manner) who and what he was. Mr. Richardson, the master of the school, had manifested the kindest feeling, and withal a considerable amount of plain good sense, when the question of Myles' unfortunate birth was discussed between him and Sir Matthew. He had entirely agreed, too—was it probable that he would do otherwise?—to a proposition made by the little boy's grandfather, to the effect that Myles should remain for a while in ignorance that there was, what the world calls, a stain upon his parentage.

“Time enough,” Sir Matthew said, “when the little lad is stronger both in mind and body ; he is but an infant yet, poor fellow, and children will be children.”

Mr. Richardson, as he was in duty bound, entirely coincided with this original remark. He

had been young once himself, he said, to say nothing of the length of time which he had devoted to the delightful task of forming the boyish mind.

Sir Matthew was quite aware that this was the case, indeed he felt no hesitation,—so full and entire was his conviction—in committing little Myles to his kind care, and that of Mrs. Richardson ; and so, after a few more civil words, they parted.

But notwithstanding the promise of secrecy implied by the suburban dominie (Camperdown House was “salubriously situated” about five miles south-west of the Monument), the little world of mimic men soon knew that it was by charity only that the Baronet’s grandson was allowed to bear the name of Fendall ; and then (the result was as natural as the child’s own birth) each school-boy, father to the man he one day hoped to be, made ready the shafts of ridicule, and took from his small quiver the arrows to be aimed with such thoughtless readiness at that small human target. At the commencement of this juvenile system of persecution, Myles was too young either to understand or feel the force of the hard words which those youths of tender years hurled at him. Know-

ledge, however, came with added years ; but he had gone through a hardening process there, somewhat after the fashion of the poor climbing-boys, who—if we may believe the statements of the philanthropists by whom ineffectual appeals to public mercy are occasionally made in their behalf—are systematically and carefully rubbed at their most salient points, *id est*, their elbows and their knees with irritating substances, such as strong-made brine, the while the little martyrs are exposed before a furnace worthy of being heated by a Nebuchadnezzar ; and all in order that the said poor children of the lower ranks might better bear the friction they would inevitably meet with in their progress up the narrow, difficult, and *dirty* ways through which their course of life must lead them.

So, something after this manner was Myles' moral cuticle indurated ; and he was thus spared many a wound and bruise which might, in after life, have told upon him cruelly. There was, beside, another useful worldly lesson which he learned amongst the coarse spirits presided over by the obsequious Mr. Richardson and his thrifty spouse ; for the conviction—born of his isolation, his no-holidays, and, last not least, of his initiation into the secret of his position—grew daily

stronger within him, that he must be the father of his own fortunes ; and that, by combating bravely, he would in the end conquer his fate.

"I fear that Myles is very fond of money," Sir Matthew had remarked to Mr. Santland. "I heard something of the propensity from Mr. Richardson ; and his aunt, poor Mary Hannum, who always has a kind word to say about him, no longer boasts of the little presents that her nephew makes her. I am terribly afraid that he is fond of money, although where he gets it from" (it is to be supposed that Sir Matthew alluded to the vice, and not the hoarded cash), "is more than I can tell."

"I imagine," rejoined the Rector, "that he agrees with Horace, that *Et genus et virtus, nisi cum re, vilior algá est* ; and, going a step further, he acts as though money could make amends for the absence of the two first-named gifts."

When the kindly owner of Hazel Combe made the notable discovery I have just recorded, Myles was enjoying the first holidays which he had ever spent beneath his grandfather's roof. The reader may perhaps recollect the time I speak of, for during that, his first vacation, there occurred the memorable ball at Westerham Abbey, and the scarcely less exciting attack

upon the fair Janetta in the narrow lane leading to Wetham Down.

Since that period Myles had been seldom at the Combe, for it being deemed advisable that he should acquire a knowledge of modern languages, he was placed at a school in Switzerland¹; in which country, with occasional changes to Germany and France, he remained till such time as he was old enough to enter a military college in England.

And now, having given a slight sketch of the early life of Colonel Matthew's son, it only remains to describe, as briefly as possible, the appearance and character of the young Ensign who made his appearance at Combe Hatton, by special invitation from his grandfather, three days previously to Johnnie Fendall's marriage day.

To begin with, then, "Master Myles," as the old servants still continued to call him, was decidedly short of stature—a misfortune which he had always grievously deplored, nor was there anything in his appearance to redeem it from the charge of being "underbred:" for his shoulders were rather high, his features too strongly marked, his auburn hair was curled over-tightly by nature's hand, and his voice rather high-pitched and querulous.

But in spite of all these impediments to distinction there was yet a something undefined in Myles' *tout ensemble* which saved him from the—in his opinion—mortal disgrace of looking like a shop-boy. It was true that his features were anything but regular, and that his blue eyes were wanting in colour and in lustre ; but then, to make up for these deficiencies, his countenance possessed an amount of shrewdness (it could scarcely be called intellect, although Myles' powers of mind were decidedly above the average), which could not fail to strike even a casual observer. His smile, too, was agreeable, and his teeth white and even. Except for the *old* expression of his face, you would have thought him even younger than his age, his cheeks and lips were still so smooth and soft ; but talk to him for five minutes only, and watch the keen play of his light blue eyes, and you would have been surprised indeed to learn that he was still under twenty.

The love of money, so lamented by Sir Matthew, had not decreased with years ; but the old man was wrong in fancying that Myles hoarded up his cash for the mere love of gloating over his well loved gains ; for the boy looked upon every penny as a means towards an end—as something

that was in some way—generally an indirect one—to bring about a possible result, advantageous to himself in time to come.

I have said that Myles' mental powers were above the average, and to this statement I may add that his memory was excellent, and his perseverance great. Whatever he undertook to do, he succeeded in doing well; he never lost an opportunity of making a useful friend, and the only enemies he feared to enlist against him were those who might have it in their power on some future occasion to be of use to him. To conclude, Myles Fendall was one whose passions would always be subservient to his interests; and whose conversational talents, considerable as they were, would never be exerted save for those whose good opinion he was desirous of conciliating. He was sarcastic by nature, and this dangerous quality was only kept in check by the presence of those whom his head, but not his heart, rendered him fearful of wounding.

Little as the Westerns had seen of their (in some sort) young cousin, the female members of the family opened their arms to him at once. Myles, with his usual quickness of apprehension, perceived at a glance the cause of this rapid inclination in his favour; and, nothing unwilling

to ingratiate himself with the nieces of the popular Lord Westerham, whose house in Paris was the pleasantest in that agreeable modern Gomorrah; he soon glided, with his usual niceness of tact, into that attractive branch of conversation—namely, ridicule of a successful female friend.

Bessie—honest, confiding, high-hearted, Bessie—had no suspicion that while the relations of her betrothed called her “dear” so kindly, and appeared to take so affectionate an interest in her and all her bridal presents, they were, at every possible opportunity, ridiculing her country manners and her unknown birth; while Myles—she had always been so kind to Myles—fed them with funny sayings, the object of which was to pander to their envious feelings towards the bride-elect.

But ignorant as Bessie was, and, indeed, was likely to remain, of the kind of social treachery of which she was the object, Santland, whose natural clear-sightedness was increased tenfold when his ward's happiness was likely to be imperilled, detected the mean bye-game at once, and feared that it might end in sad and serious earnest.

“What, and how much, does that young Lynx

suspect?" he asked himself as, on the eve of Bessie's wedding, he sat alone in his dull study, a prey to melancholy thoughts; "what, and how much, does he suspect, and has he any of the high-bred delicacy which would lead him to keep secret what he knows? Alas! I fear me, not; for he has within him a kind of pagan Jesuitism which will make him see in her misfortune a palliation for and a comfort in his own."

The important morning dawned, a hot and hazy first of August morning, and Bessie, in her simple white silk dress, her bridal veil, and wreath of orange blossoms, walked, leaning on her guardian's arm, between the rows of village school-children to church.

The few friends and relations invited to be present at the ceremony were already assembled in the chancel—Myles Fendall, standing near Janetta, and entertaining her during the progress of the service with remarks not wholly suited to the solemnity of the occasion—

"Oh *worth* and innocence! Oh, milk and water!
Oh the dump fingers of the Rector's daughter!"

misquoted the sarcastic Ensign, in a whisper, to his congenial friend, as they watched the agitated girl's attempts to draw off her white glove,

preparatory to the placing on her finger of the mystic marriage symbol.

Janetta concealed with considerable difficulty her suppressed titter in her gorgeous bridesmaid's bouquet; nay, so eager was she to conceal all public testimony to Myles' questionable wit, that she failed to hear his question, cautiously murmured in her ear, of who the wonderful-looking "buster" was, standing so very near to Johnnie, and looking, with his long, grizzled beard, so like the ancient mariner, come with his skinny hands and glittering eye

"To mar the marriage ceremony."

But although Janetta failed to hear the question, Johnnie Fendall had seen the man whose appearance, uninvited amongst the wedding guests, had called forth his young nephew's query. He had noticed the strange fixedness of the glaring eye, and had recognised the singular orbits which, on one tempestuous night in March, had been directed with such strange fixedness on his.

With a strong effort, after this discovery, he turned his attention to the vows which he was called upon to utter. But no sooner were he and that fair maiden pronounced to be man and

wife before the Lord, than he glanced quickly round in search of the grizzled stranger, who had touched him almost as he stood beside the trembling Bessie at the altar. He looked, but the mysterious individual Myles called "buster" was no longer to be seen; and Johnnie, with a strange misgiving at his heart, handed his bride in silence to the carriage which awaited them.

CHAPTER VII.

JOHNNIE DISMOUNTED.

A BRIGHTER and a happier looking creature than Bessie Fendall, when, after a two months' absence on the Continent, she and her husband returned to Hazel Combe, could scarcely be imagined. There was not a sign remaining on her countenance of the shadows which conflicting hopes and fears had so lately cast over its brightness; and as for Johnnie, truly the old domestics who had sorrowed over the sight of his thin, thoughtful face, found it hard to recognise the "bookish gentleman" (they used the word half scornfully) in the man with elastic step and pleasant smile, who had lately returned with his young bride amongst them.

"I am so glad you think my husband looking well and happy, Guardie," Bessie remarked to the Rector, on the morning following her arrival. She was very proud of being able to use the word "husband" as applied to a possession of

her own; and Santland augured well for her prospects of domestic contentment as he noted her pretty blush of conscious happiness.

"I am so glad you are satisfied with his looks, and we have been enjoying ourselves so thoroughly! Johnnie has not had a gloomy hour since we left the Combe!"

"Really!" exclaimed the Rector, in affected astonishment. "How have you contrived to exorcise the evil spirit? I trust, however, that after this exceptional honeymoon, Fendall's gloomy hours, as you call them, may be henceforth laid by for ever in your skeletonless closet, my dear Bessie. But do not make too sure of such a happy riddance. You have done great things, my dear; you have unbent the *tree*,—a tardy and a difficult operation, for the twig received an unfortunate bias in early life, and it has required a miracle of Love's and an honest-hearted woman's working to undo the mischief."

Bessie listened with a half-indignant, half-wondering expression to the words of her accustom'd oracle.

"I am sure, Guardie," she said at last, "that Johnnie's mind never has been warped. Only hear him talk! There is no one half so

liberal — no one with more expanded views. He has fewer prejudices than any one I ever heard of.”

“Pshaw, child! what do you know of liberality? and will *you* be so unprejudiced as to agree with me, when I aver that all the regrettable points in your husband’s character may be traced to the misfortune of his having been born a younger son?”

“Impossible! Johnnie never could have been envious; and I would stake my life on the truth that he is incapable of coveting his brother’s birthright.”

“He is not exactly a Cain, probably,” responded the Rector, with a coolness which was at striking variance with his companion’s excited tone, “but for all that, the contrast which, from his childhood, his peculiar disposition led him to draw between Matthew’s prospects and his own, produced an early and an injurious effect upon him. It was his misfortune, besides, to feel greatly his own undeniable mental superiority over his brother, and thus——but it is needless to enter into the details of the boyish and not over successful campaigns which Johnnie has fought with his own internal enemies. Doubt, my child, is a species of terrible duel with our-

selves, and rarely, in that single combat, do we come off conquerors."

"I hope the fight is over, Guardie," said Bessie, hopefully. "We have have had many serious conversations on the subjects to which I think you allude, and——"

"I am sorry for it, child; for your ideas concerning primary formation and pre-Adamite man, although, I have no doubt, edifying enough in themselves, can scarcely be advanced enough to settle sundry important questions by which your husband's mind has been unhappily disturbed. Dreaming is a luxury which you must absolutely and resolutely deny to your patient. Had he possessed the interest in yonder beautiful park that Matthew has, think you that he would have required the extraneous business afforded to his mental faculties by diving into mysteries which are not given to man to know? He loves his home, his county, his ancestral trees, the exquisite views of this most pleasant land; and it is something, as I used to tell him, to have received his first impressions of nature in a scene so fair. But because—albeit, he is a 'native here'—'he was not to the *manor* born,' poor Johnnie looked on all around him with a jaundiced eye, and saw no good in anything."

“And can I do nothing, Guardie?” Bessie said, despairingly, for as usual Santland’s opinions were forming themselves as a law unto her mind. “Can I do nothing to soften this misfortune to him? I think that in ambition, in a wish to benefit his kind——”

“Tush, girl! you must be moderate in your hopes for Johnnie. He is not of the stuff that men remarkable in the annals of the world are made of. He may be an active, useful, moderate man; keep him within the bounds required for *that*, and save him the sore re-action of disappointment—save him the ‘fall o’ the other side’ which will be his fate if, as I fear, when mounted on the unbroken Pegasus—Ambition—he will o’erleap himself.”

“But, Guardie,” pleaded poor Bessie, he has so many——”

“Hobbies,” broke in the Rector. “Let him ride them and welcome. *They* will keep his mind employed and active. They will amuse him, and do no harm to any one. And now, my child, let us have done with wisdom and with unasked-for counsel; remembering only this, that of the present world only we are sure; and, therefore, that whilst endeavouring to make our duties here subservient to our

chances of an after existence, of which we know so little, we should never forget that to be happy is our being's end and aim, and that—

‘ The meanest flow’ret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the earth, the skies,’

are means given us for enjoyment, and may tend to bring us nearer to a solution of the great mystery, of which, perhaps, it is as well, after all, that we should think as little as possible.”

“ But, Guardie——”

“ Stop, child. He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right ! Let you and Johnnie, and let each and all of us, bear this in mind ; and then, whilst mad and learned men distract their own and others’ brains with subtle disquisitions, we may lie down upon our beds in peace, fearing no evil ; for although we may be the lowest on the ladder of knowledge, our consciences may be void of offence, both towards the unknown God whom we ignorantly worship, and towards our fellow worms, in whose behalf, to say nothing of our own chances of future reward, we should do well to follow out the Golden Rule—‘ Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.’ ”

CHAPTER VIII.

MYLES PROVES HIMSELF A SON OF EVE.

SEVERAL important changes for the better had taken place in Hazel Combe and its neighbourhood after the departure of the bridal pair ; and, of these, the first and foremost was the departure, to join his regiment in India, of Myles Fendall.

There could be no doubt, that had he himself desired it, arrangements might have been made which would have obviated the necessity of his taking that long and tedious voyage, for the regiment's period of service in India had nearly expired, and it was amongst the first in order for home. But, whether it was that the Ensign felt anxious to see again the father from whom he had so long been separated, or whether (which was more probable) he saw, or thought he saw, in the Bengal Presidency some opening for advancement—certain it is that he took his leave of Hazel Combe with no *real* evidence of sorrow on his countenance, and that his adieux to his

Aunt Mary, who was now a thriving *farmeress* on her own account, were spoken in a cheerful spirit.

“You will be sure to write, my dear,” said the good creature, as she wiped away a tear with her large pocket-handkerchief—a handkerchief very different in texture from the fine-worked cambric “things” she pronounced so useless, and which Myles (it was the fashion twenty years ago) used to display so proudly from his breast coat-pocket.

They were walking near the old farmhouse, whose four gables were built of brown crumbling-looking bricks, on which two venerable pear-trees stretched their rugged arms; and Mary—she was a middle-aged woman then—was thinking how long it would be before she saw the lad again, and wondering, too, whether, when he came home—years hence, perhaps—she would still be his “Aunt Mary,” as of old—feeling his boyish, loving kiss upon her cheek (for, to do him justice, he had never yet neglected his poor mother’s sister), and tracing in his clear blue eyes and auburn hair a something of her darling Annie’s beauty.

“I can only stay an hour with you, Auntie,” the young gentleman remarked, looking at a

little "foolish" watch—one which, in Mary's estimation, was a fitting *pendant* to the much despised cambric handkerchief.

"I have had so much to do, but I couldn't bear to go without seeing you; and here is something which you must wear for my sake;" —and as he spoke, he drew from his waistcoat-pocket a small parcel wrapped in silver paper.

"Lor, my dear," said blunt, plain-spoken Mary; "had you nothing better to do with your money than to buy foolishness for me? It's very pretty, surely," she said, looking admiringly at a Scotch pebble brooch, showily set in silver; "but you should have kept it for a handsome sweetheart, who would do it justice. And that reminds me, Myles, my dear, that, as you are going so very far away, I'd better not be waiting longer, but just give you, dear, the lock of your poor mother's hair I took for you. I had it put into a locket: here it is, it isn't much to look at, but you'll always keep it, Myles, for her poor, blessed sake."

It was almost the first time, strange to say, that Myles had ever heard Aunt Mary speak about his mother—the mother who was only associated in his mind with the mortifications of his boyhood; and it is scarcely to be won-

dered at that he did not respond very warmly to the sudden appeal to his feelings which the excellent woman had just ventured on. He took the locket, however; which, contrary to Aunt Mary's opinion, was, he thought, very "much to look at;" and putting it, with a sort of boyish confusion of manner, into his pocket, he promised to take care of it.

"Every care, Aunt Mary," he said, "and thank you very much for thinking of me. But," he exclaimed, with a start, and suddenly interrupting himself, "who the—— who on earth is that?" and he pointed, as he spoke, to a figure which might well excite his surprise and curiosity; for the uncouth and grey-bearded man whom he saw standing near the farmhouse garden-gate was no other than the unbidden guest at his Uncle Johnnie Fendall's wedding.

"Who is it, Aunt Mary?" he repeated, in a whisper. "I have seen the fellow before, and by Jove——"

"Come in the back way," said Mary, in a low, hurried voice. And Myles saw that she was in real alarm, as she endeavoured to lead him from the spot.

She had never been in the habit of exercising

control over her nephew, and she was rather surprised to find that, instead of complying with her wish, he was moving onwards towards the gate.

"It's all very well, Aunt Mary," he said, half laughing, though still with an evident determination to have his own way; "but that fellow's a suspicious character—a regular trespasser, and he has no business here. Besides, Uncle Fendall said he'd give fifty pounds to find out who he was, and——"

"Be quiet, boy," said Mary, in a voice rendered hoarse by emotion. "You do not know of whom you are speaking,—you do not know your danger. Come this way, for Heaven's sake," she cried vehemently, as they perceived that the man, who, although advanced in years, seemed still vigorous and active, was advancing rapidly towards them.

"Come quickly—through this gate!" and, almost dragging her astonished companion after her, she quickly raised the latchet of a solid door built in the orchard wall, and in another moment an iron bolt was drawn between them and the man who, as was now evident from the noise outside, had followed on their footsteps.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mary, in a broken voice; and then, "Myles, do not lose a moment. He will go round the other way. Hurry across the orchard. God bless you, dear. Be good, and say your prayers, and don't forget your mother, child, when you're away in Ingia."

"But, Aunt Mary, I cannot leave you in this way. I must know more about that man. He may be a lunatic,"—Aunt Mary shuddered—"he may be dangerous—he——"

"He is dangerous; he is—Myles, go away—I cannot tell you."

"But I must know, if I stay here till midnight. Aunt Mary, I must—I will be told. There is some horrid mystery; and, by Heaven, if you do not let me know it, I will unbar the door and speak to him myself."

His hand was on the bolt, as though he were on the point of drawing it from its staple and confronting the individual, who seemed concentrating his fury on the harmless wood, so heavy were the blows he dealt upon it.

But Mary placed her fingers on her nephew's hand, and held it firmly.

"You *will* be told?" she said. "Well, it is your fault, not mine; so, if the dismal news should trouble you in aftertimes, you must not

blame Aunt Mary ; ” and, resting her head upon his shoulder, she burst into tears.

“ Well ? ” he whispered, in an accent which betrayed, that even while he kissed the weeping woman’s forehead kindly, he was not to be diverted from his purpose.

“ Well then,” said the poor creature, with a sudden effort, “ that unfortunate, whom you would betray, is your mother’s father—your grandfather, my poor Myles ; and he is—Oh, Heavens ! begone, for he has left the door, and in another minute he may be here—he is, Myles—may God be merciful to him, for, alas ! he is a *lunatic* ! ”

CHAPTER IX.

JANETTA EXCITES A SENSATION.

THE departure from England for an indefinite period of Myles Fendall, was a source of no sorrow to Mr. Santland; nor, indeed, if the truth must be told, was the young gentleman's absence considered as a matter for much regret at the Combe itself. For Sir Matthew never could, in spite of all his efforts, master the difficulty of attaching himself to Colonel Matthew's son; and that he could not was, to the kind old man, a source of constant but unavailing regret.

"I suppose that every thing and every body has changed since my day," he remarked, one afternoon, to the Rector, pointing as he spoke to Myles (it was a few days before the latter's departure, and he was, with all the complacency of a thoroughly selfish man, smoking his cigar within *scenting* distance of the library window). "Everything has changed; for in my day, if a


gentleman smoked, he was far from making a parade of his occupation ; but now——”

“Smoke is everything, and everything either is or ends in smoke,” said the Rector, to whose friendly ear the innocent old English gentleman was in the habit of confiding his opinions regarding the objectionable practices of the “rising generation.”

“Smoke is undeniably everywhere. Look at it curling over Witham Down—shutting out my view of that exquisite church spire in the distance. Oh ! that I should have lived to see the dark foretellings of the great prophet so luminously fulfilled ! Oh ! that the ‘brilliant Frenchman’ could be awakened from his half-century’s slumber to hear the thunder and the shriek proclaim that the ‘old dotard’ had looked with a seer’s vision into futurity.”

Sir Matthew appeared, as indeed he felt, considerably puzzled by this discursive flight into the realms of steam ; while to his uninitiated mind Santland’s allusions to the great rival philosophers of the last century were utterly incomprehensible.

“My dear sir,” he began, “if you are talking of the steam-engine, I remember when I was little more than a boy——”



"Your motto was 'slow and sure,' eh! Sir Matthew," put in the Rector. He was usually the most courteous of men, but during the many years of his intimacy at the Combe instances of his old friend's prolixity on the subject of his juvenile reminiscences had not been rare; and Santland, remembering an appointment which he had made at Westerham Abbey, cut short Sir Matthew's verbosity with a ruthless hand.

"It is hard to say what amount of rapidity will be required by young people ere long," he said, kindly humouring the old man's foible. "They insist upon travelling at Sir Isaac's anticipated rate of speed *now*; but soon, I suspect, nothing short of electricity will satisfy them. There is a great deal of 'running to and fro,' but I doubt much whether knowledge is thereby increased. In my opinion, the terminus most certain to be reached, after their hurried journeys, by the young men of the present day, is—their wits' end. And now, what say you to a walk as far as Westerham? I am rather curious to see how the Abbey looks without Mrs. Western. She was a striking portion of the ruins, and I doubt whether a wiser woman will fill the place as well."

"She wore very well, certainly," suggested Sir Matthew.

"That she did; indeed I may venture to say that a handsomer specimen of well-preserved antiquity than Richard Western's wife it has seldom been the antiquarian's lot to see."

But instead of accompanying the pedestrians on their excursion through the pleasant lanes and across the fields of waving corn to Westersham, I will explain how it was that Mrs. Richard Western no longer reigned as vice-queen within the old Abbey walls.

As a first cause of this great change I must divulge the melancholy fact, that the fair Janetta, wearied of the surplus time allowed her for maiden meditation, had, infinitely to the displeasure of every member of her family, contracted a marriage with an inferior.

How it came about that a young lady, reared and nursed in the lap of exclusiveness, should have detected (as Barbara justly remarked) a human being under the garb of that "odious young apothecary," was a question frequently mooted at the Abbey; but that she *had* made the extremely reprehensible discovery, became an incontrovertible fact when Crutchley, Junior, (the name was on a brass plate outside a door

in Hillingstone,) had the astounding impertinence to call upon Mr. Western and demand the hand of his daughter, Miss Janetta, in marriage.

It is useless attempting a description of the accumulated family wrath which was hurled at the head of the offender, nor is it necessary to recapitulate the strong arguments used by even the mild and peace-loving Privy Councillor, to deter his daughter from a measure so every way outrageous.

Janetta listened, but stood firm as adamant against the shock. She made no excuses, either for herself or for the audacious lover who had dared to proclaim his readiness to carry a portionless daughter of the noble house of Westerham to the humble medical home which alone he had to offer her. She was of age—alas! that was no recent discovery; and if she chose to prefer love in a surgery to the aristocratic dulness joined to the dignified penury of Westerham Abbey, it surely was no one's affair but her own.

To this utilitarian and common sense view of the question Mr. Western was the first to subscribe, "for," as he wisely remarked to his indignant lady, "if Janetta is determined to marry the pill-grinder no one has a right to

prevent it ; and the sooner the thing is done, and decently done, the better."

"If I could only know how it began," moaned unhappy Mrs. Westerham, who seemed to consider the commencement of her daughter's love affair as of still more importance than its end. "It seems so odd to have been flirting over draught bottles and leech glasses ; and yet, when could she have spoken to the horrid man, except when she had that bilious fever three months ago ?"

"It is very evident," rejoined Mr. Western, "that Janetta saw Mr. Thomas Crutchley's black whiskers with no jaundiced eyes ; or he might have written her *billet doux* in doctor's Latin, or—who can say ?—' Maidens, like moths, are ever caught with glare '—our daughter has possibly been fascinated by the gas lamp and coloured vases in the apothecary's window ; and so may have surrendered (I can hardly call it *with* discretion) to a power stronger than herself."

But, although Mr. Western contrived to muster up a feeble joke on the subject of his daughter's courtship, he was very far from seeing any part of the business in a facetious point of view. Nay, so strong was what the family

called his *feeling* on the subject, that he resolved—finding that the objectionable young surgeon was likely to be a fixture in Hillingstone—on removing himself and the remaining portion of his belongings from the Abbey.

“I shall see you married, Janetta,” he said, and then I’m off.”

“I really don’t see what my marrying has to do with your leaving Westerham,” said Janetta, rather disconsolately; for there would, as she was well aware, be a considerable diminution of her importance when the Abbey could no longer be designated as the abode of her parents. And in truth she did sometimes, in the solitude of her chamber, and while communing closely with her own *head*, experience occasional misgivings with regard to the wisdom of the step she was meditating.

“He certainly does use (as Barbara says, so provokingly) some vulgar expressions now and then,” mused Janetta. “But I can tell him of them by degrees, and suggest that he had better not ask me if I am going for a ‘ride in the chaise,’ and all that sort of thing. After all, he is very good-natured and good-looking, and if he is a little priggish, and—and—vulgar, I must hope he will improve.” And

JANETTA EXCITES A SENSATION.

Janetta, opening her drawers and trunks, endeavoured to seek consolation in the sight of the bridal paraphernalia, which was accumulating for her adornment.

CHAPTER X.

WARNINGS.

MR. WESTERN'S letter to his elder brother, announcing his relinquishment of the Abbey as a place of residence for himself and his family, reached Paris at an auspicious moment; for Lord Westerham, whose attacks of gout had lately been frequent, was inclined, for perhaps the first time within his memory, to take the affairs of life *au sérieux*.

"Lady Westerham," he had said to his good-natured, sympathising wife, and that no later than an hour previous to the delivery of Richard's missive—"Lady Westerham, it is a terrible domestic fact, and I have hid it from myself to the last moment, but I grieve to confess *que je me fais vieux*."

"Nonsense, Westerham," laughed Lady W——; "I never saw you look better."

"Or stouter," sighed his lordship, who was

painfully conscious of weighing seventeen stone and upwards.

"There! I knew exactly how it was! You have been weighing yourself again; you are your own skeleton in the closet, Westerham. I have always told you so."

"Rather in the flesh," rejoined her husband, with a grim smile at his own facetiousness. "And that portion of myself having been always deplorably weak, does not, I regret to say, strengthen as it ought to do with years. I could no more have resisted that last slice of *foie gras*, Lady W., than I could have stood upon my head; and it has played the deuce with me this morning."

He was not the least out of temper. Irritability, under any circumstances, was a thing unknown to that amiable *insouciant* man; but he did sigh over his loss of power to enjoy with impunity the good things before him, and the idea of removing himself out of the way of temptation had more than once crossed his mind.

"If it were not for Clarice," he said, musingly, "I think it would be better to leave Paris."

"Do you, dear?" said Lady Westerham, a

little in dismay ; for Clarice, the pretty stumbling-block, was her only daughter—a little lively woman, who had married a *lion Français* of the first quality—a great, red-bearded member of the Jockey Club, whose ideas of matrimonial duties and obligations were on the most liberally extensive scale.

“Do you really think it would do to leave Paris?” Lady Westerham asked. “I am not sure you would know what to do with yourself anywhere else.”

“I am quite certain that I know what Paris means to do with me, if I stay,” growled the Earl. “But here is the English post—François’ knock all the world over.” And he nodded familiarly at the old *facteur* from the balcony of the sitting-room.

“*Tiens, François! Attrape, mon garçon!*” and, as he spoke the words, he threw a silver coin towards the grey-haired postman. The man caught it cleverly enough ; it was not the first *piece blanche*, by many, which, during a service of years, he had dexterously caught from that liberal hand.

“*Merci, Monsieur, et à l’avantage;*” and touching his cap respectfully, he went on his way.

"A letter from Richard," said Lord Westerham, sitting down comfortably to its perusal. And then it was, "Hallo! What's this? Dick wants to leave the Abbey. Tired of it, I suppose. No, he isn't; his daughter has married the apothecary at Hillingstone."

"How very odd!" remarked his wife, without looking up from the letter she was writing.

"Very odd; and Dick says that as Janetta's doctor objects to giving up practice in Hillingstone, *he* declines practising on my liberality any more at Westerham."

"How like Richard!"

"Very like Richard. Richard's always himself. But, Lady Westerham, what do you say to taking a turn at the Abbey ourselves this autumn? We can take Pétard, you know, and fire off some dinners to the county. Besides, if I'm laid up, I shall have the benefit of my nephew's advice gratis."

The proposition was at first treated as a joke by pleasure-loving Lady Westerham, who was still young enough to enjoy the Parisian delights of dress *spectacles*, dinners at the *Rocher*, and drives in the eternal Bois; but when she began to perceive that her husband was in earnest, and

that he had in reality conceived the idea of recruiting his shattered health by a sojourn in his native county, then the excellent and affectionate woman gave way at once, and she entered, *con amore*, into "Westerham's last mania."

"A nice, cheerful, hearty, good-natured creature," was Santland's remark to Bessie, after he had made acquaintance with Lady Westerham. "There is not a line traced by envy or scandal-loving in her face. Scandal-loving is not among the Parisian vices—all praise to them. Live and let live; sin and let sin, say they; whilst *we* are for ever investigating our neighbour's means of existence, speculating on what he has, besides running down what he is, and drawing aside the curtain from every poor little peccadillo which our unfortunate neighbours have carefully hid behind it."

"I like her, because she is inclined to be so good to Janetta Crutchley. She does not treat her in the least like a to-be-patronised relation; and to hear the frank kind way in which she talks to Tom Crutchley, you would think she had lived in that sort of set all her life."

"Lady Westerham is a duke's daughter, Bessie, and is not afraid of committing herself.

But I shall like to hear some of your remarks on the spurious kind of fine ladies. You will have plenty to tell me after your first London season, of all the little and great unworthinesses, of all the stooped-to insults, of all the ——”

“Guardie,” cried Bessie, “I shall have nothing to tell you. I have no wish to look behind the scenes. I mean (as I once before told you) to be happy—happy in my own way, with Johnnie’s friends—with yours, Guardie; for you have promised to let me know some of those men of genius whose acquaintance I have already, by means of their most wondrous works, begun.”

She spoke eagerly and rapidly, with her dark eyes sparkling as she looked up in the Rector’s face.

He patted the hand that lay upon his arm with something of a suppressing action.

“Ah, Bessie!” he said, “you are not changed, my child. You still are craving for the larger flowers; still restless, still unsatisfied! You would be happier here, my dear—happier far among the humble flowers of the field; for elsewhere you will toil and spin.”

“Only for Johnnie, Guardie.”

“ Well, so be it, then. Only for Johnnie !
God help her, poor child !—only for Johnnie,”
he continued to mutter in soliloquy, after Bessie
had bid him farewell beneath the shadow of the
arching elms.

CHAPTER XI.

BESSIE'S SEASON.

Bessie had not been many weeks established in London when she began to confess to herself that, as usual, her guardian was in the right, and that to be ambitious for Johnnie was a mistake. It was very disappointing. He had so much that went towards the "makings" of a great man: talents—at least his wife believed so, exalted views of general philanthropy, and a fine liberal spirit, which, were it only allowed to work, could not fail to blend in one harmonious whole all the discordant elements of society.

"If only Johnnie had the daring—but half the daring even, of R—— and P——; if he had but a quarter of the soul-stirring eloquence of G——, I should feel sure of his success," Bessie said to the Rector, who was paying her a short visit in London.

"But," returned Santland in reply, "failing

the gifts you covet, the merest chattering *charlatan* who possesses the quality of impudence, and the command of language, has a better chance than Fendall of rising to political importance."

But if Bessie were fated to see her illusions regarding her husband's future importance vanish one by one, she was at least consoled by the certainty that he deserved the success which he appeared so little likely to attain. She could rejoice in secret over his grand, broad plans for the benefiting and exalting of his kind; over his projects for the amelioration of the million poor, and for the better ordering of the power of the rich.

"It is an age of gold and rags," the musing man would say; and Bessie, looking up admiringly, pronounced in her own mind the speech an axiom.

"I am afwaid you 'we a dweadful wadical, Mrs. Fendall," lisped Dandy Dick, one afternoon, when Bessie, in her Park Lane drawing-room, was uttering her pretty woman's version of Johnnie's somewhat crude political theories. "What would become of the countwy without a peewage?"

"Oh, you may have a peerage, of course,"

said Bessie, rather impatiently ; for she was provoked to find that both Santland and his old friend Dr. Shirly, who were present, seemed, by their silence, to consider Dandy Dick and his hostess to be well-matched opponents. "Of course you must have a Third Estate ; but it need not be hereditary. Hereditary idiots ! to aid in governing such a country as this !"

"But if they 'we idiots, they shut them up," suggested Dick.

"Not always," retorted Bessie, meaningly ; and Dandy Dick, finding that he had nothing more to say, lounged to the fireplace, admired himself in the glass, and took his leave.

"A curious mannered young man, that," said Dr. Shirly, gravely. "What is his profession ?"

"He has a little place about the Court, which he obtained by dint of incessant importunity," replied Bessie, who, to say the truth, was not over partial to the conceited cousin, who had never lost the habit of treating her superciliously.

"He would not work, but to beg he was not ashamed," said Santland.

"And," rejoined Bessie, "he is as proud of his small waiting-gentleman's place as—as—— Oh, Guardie, I never told you about our little

chambermaid at Paris. I was talking to her one day—she was a pretty, well-mannered little thing—about her family, which she said was from Normandy originally. ‘And your father,’ I asked, ‘what does he do now?’ Rosalie drew herself up proudly. ‘*Madame*,’ she said, ‘*Il a une place à la cour, mon père.*’ ‘*Une place à la cour! Comment donc? Qu’est ce qu’il fait à la cour, monsieur votre père?*’ ‘*Madame*,’ said Rosalie, with, as I thought, a little diminution of dignity, ‘*il ramasse les feuilles.*’”

Santland laughed. “And so does Dandy Dick,” he said, “in the shape of little miserable scraps of personal importance, which no one thinks worth considering but himself; and all the while he affects to despise as dependants the workers for such payment as he is content and proud to receive for doing nothing.”

But on the whole, and making due allowance for some unavoidable disappointments, Bessie enjoyed her London season much. With most of her acquaintances, too, she was very popular, especially with those of the contrary sex, by whom her happy spirits and pleasant flow of words were greatly appreciated. Of female friends she could not count on many. They were jealous, probably, of her success—a jealo u

which Mrs. Fendall could neither suspect nor comprehend ; and then there was something provoking in the utter impossibility of patronising the independent wife of the Member for —— ; for Bessie wanted nothing that the “ fine ladies ” could give, and was one of the few who enjoyed society for itself and without reference to the smiles or frowns of fashionable monarchs.

“ And how about the celebrities, my child ? ” asked Santland ; “ you have seen something of them now. Do they bear a closer examination, or have they, too, lost their *prestige*, now you have seen them, as it were, *en deshabille* ? ”

“ Don’t ask me, Guardie,” Bessie replied, with a prettily-affected expression of disgust. “ To think of a great poet——”

“ Not a *great* one—I know of whom you are about to speak.”

“ Well, not a great one, then ; but an elegant and an exquisite creator of lines the most polished that, in my opinion, one ever reads. Think of such a man being coarse in his ways and habits ! And, Guardie, do you know, he actually complained to me that, when you breakfasted with him, you ate too much butter, and informed me that the said butter was twopence a pat ! ”

Santland laughed heartily. "I shall devour four," he said, "next time I honour the old skeleton with my company in St. James's Place. But have you anything more to say about the higher brothers? I like to hear your comments, child."

"Only that W—— talks of no one but himself, and one day took the trouble to inform me that he never wrote a line of poetry without having a dictionary at hand to look for words!"

"Whereas you imagined, in your simplicity, that a poet's rhymes flowed out upon the page like water from a bucket!"

"Exactly," laughed Mrs. Fendall. "But R——, the portrait painter, has disenchanted me the most. He was so delicate in his compliments when I sat to him—looked at me so admiringly, and insinuated such delicious truths about my eyes and my expression, that I was quite fascinated. Dr. Shirly, too, was with me, and poor Louisa, who, we know, is rather *passée*. However, she, too, came in—being a *sitter*—for her full share of praise; indeed, I can scarcely imagine two better-satisfied women than we were when we drove away from the great artist's door."

"And what caused the reaction?—and how were you brought to your senses?"

"By a piece of information afforded me by Mrs. White—Louisa's former governess, you know—who had taken a pupil yesterday for a sitting to Mr. R——. 'Was she ever the least good-looking?' he dared to ask of her, when only two days before he had appeared to consider poor Louisa in the light of a Venus unappreciated."

When Mr. Santland had been a fortnight in London (he seldom prolonged his stay beyond that period), the end of June had arrived; and it was deemed expedient that Bessie's strength, which was rather failing, should be recruited by the country air of Hazel Combe.

Of course, however, she was not willing to depart, for Johnnie was to remain in London till the end of the session; and the Combe, with all its beauties, would, according to Bessie's view of things, be unbearable *alone*.

"Only another week, dear Johnnie," Bessie had pleaded; "for our Greenwich dinner has not yet come off, and Guardie has promised to join us; besides——"

"Have you warned the Rector what a Green-

wich dinner is ? ” asked her husband. “ For my part, I believe he will think the whole affair a bore.”

“ Indeed he wont ; he calls it the ‘ Flow of Language and the Feast of Soles,’ and insists that——”

“ Well, dear, have it your own way ; only let me be consulted about the day, as I would not miss the sight of Santland’s enjoyment of his whitebait for the world. Only I wonder, when you *were* coaxing him into such an act of dissipation, you did not give the preference to a Star and Garter dinner—Santland loves scenery so intensely, and to my mind Richmond Hill on a delicious summer evening is, as some one said of Paris, ‘ *Un des lieux du monde ou en peut le mieux se passer du bonheur.*’ ”

“ And if one is happy, too,” rejoined Bessie.

“ Is any one happy, think you, dearest ? ” asked Johnnie, seriously. “ Is your guardian happy ? Have you lived with him so long, and yet have failed to see the brooding melancholy which, like the garbage-eating vulture (you will laugh at me, and call it a horrid simile), is ever at hand to prey upon his heart’s blood, and is only chased away to come

again to the sad feast, as ravenous and as cruel as before ? ”

“ Poor Guardie ! ” Bessie murmured ; she could say no more, and her joyous spirit was for the moment chilled by the picture which her husband had conjured up.

CHAPTER XII.

A WORD TO THE UNWISE.

THE last fortnight of Mrs. Fendall's stay in London was fruitful in events, both of a public and private interest; for the Indian mail came in with news of Matthew, and the Ministry went out, after a signal defeat—the measure on which the House had divided having been originally propounded by a no less important personage than Johnnie Fendall of Hazel Combe.

Bessie's delight was extreme. Such a glorious day for the Liberals!—such a triumph for Johnnie! She would rather, of course, that he had the *kudos*, too; but the reality was everything; and then, if people would but be candid, they must confess that Johnnie deserved the entire credit of the passing of that all-important Bill. In short, Johnnie, and no one else, had turned out those objectionable Tories, and Johnnie, if there was justice in heaven or in the country, would have his reward.

The result proved, at least to a limited extent, that Mrs. Fendall was justified in putting trust in the candour and gratitude of the newly-appointed Minister ; for although Johnnie did not figure in the list as Chancellor of the Exchequer or President of the Council—either of which exalted offices his wife would probably have deemed him fully competent to fill—yet he was not altogether overlooked ; and Bessie, when the new Ministry was at length pronounced as “formed,” read with no inconsiderable amount of satisfaction her husband’s name as Under Secretary at the Tax on Talent Office.

“So, Bessie, you are a public woman,” said Santland, as on the Wednesday following he and his ward (as he still called her) were rolling in a delightfully-comfortable open carriage along the road to Richmond—“a public woman with an ambitious mind ! What a promising conjunction ! Why, child, if you don’t bear your faculties too meekly, you may hope some day to be famous, and even—for who can place a limit to what *may* be ?—to rival Mrs. Western in the world of politics.”

“Dear Guardie,” said Bessie, coaxingly, “please not to laugh at me, I am so very happy this particular afternoon.”

The Rector was serious in a moment. "Laugh *at* you, my dear—never—but *with* you often, both for your sake and for my own. Let us laugh at the prologue, child, for it is sometimes the only part of the comedy which is acted. Let us give the reins to imagination—imagination, which some may deem a useful luxury—some a thing to shut up as one would a rabid animal—but which I consider as a splendid insanity, in default of which humanity would be stultified by the immeasurable dulness of matter of fact. But, a truce with disquisition, for we are not come amongst nature's works to moralise, but to enjoy."

As Santland ceased speaking, the carriage stopped at the private gate by which the beautiful park, of which the pleasure-seekers from London know in fact so little, is entered from the Roehampton Lane. It was early in the afternoon, and Bessie and her companion, who were both excellent pedestrians, agreed to lounge away the intervening hours till dinner time beneath the fine old spreading oaks, and on the velvet turf, where groups of antlered deer, half-hidden by the tall fern, were grazing placidly. It was a deliciously shady summer day, and as Bessie strolled slowly onward, leaning on her

guardian's arm, she felt that only Johnnie's presence was wanting to render her enjoyment complete.

The remainder of the party—it was not a large one—were to join them later at the great hotel; and Bessie, with her companion, looked forward to their walk as not the least agreeable portion of the day's programme.

“So there were letters from Matthew and his son,” the latter said, after they had walked for some time in silence. “I had not time to hear the particulars; but they were good, judging from Johnnie's face.”

“Yes—how stupid of me not to speak of them! I fancied you had heard the news that Mrs. Matthew has a daughter—I wish it had been a son, Sir Matthew would have been so delighted—and—well, I do not think there was much besides. Colonel Fendall did not seem to care a great deal about it; he said that the ‘kid’ and its mother were at the Hills. I believe that was all.”

“Anything about Myles the modest?”

“Oh yes, a nice affectionate letter to me, full of pretty things.”

“Bessie, that fellow's at his dirty work again! Will you never be warned? Will you

never learn to be suspicious? You should distrust that scheming scion of the good old stock even when he is not civil—how much the more so when he fawns upon you.”

“But, Guardie, I do not call it fawning. He is only kind in his expressions; and Myles can want nothing that I have it in my power to procure for him. However, I have hardly read through his letter yet. Here it is—would you like to see it?”

“No, thank you, my dear. I have no doubt that somewhere—towards the end most likely—Master Myles’ designs may become apparent; and you can let me know when you have made the discovery.”

The letter was not a very long one, and Bessie cast her eyes over it in silence.

“Well?” said the Rector, when he had given her, as he calculated, time to make herself mistress of its contents.

“Well, Guardie,” replied Mrs. Fendall, blushing, but with an amused smile upon her face, “you are quite right, I am afraid, for Myles has certainly asked me a favour!”

“You foolish child! Of course he has.”

“He wants me—and it seems very selfish not to wish to oblige him—to ask Lady Westerham

to persuade her brother, the General, to allow him——”

“To take liberties,” interrupted Santland, angrily. “He can do that, however, without permission, it seems. Bessie, I will not hear of your asking favours—and for Myles Fendall, too? But I am not astonished at his daring to make use of you, and in such a manner—working upon your good nature. Well, it is his *métier*, I suppose; and a humbug without insolence would not earn his daily bread.”

“My dear Guardie,” said Bessie, astonished at his vehemence, “Myles only wants to be put on the Staff; he wishes to remain another year in India.”

“Then let your husband make the request,” rejoined the Rector, whose irritation seemed considerably soothed by the prospect of Myles’ lengthened absence. “Ingy, as old Dame Hickson calls it, is by far the best place for him; and the longer he remains there the better I shall be satisfied.”

The dinner, so long planned by Bessie, proved as agreeable as if it had been improvised. There were listeners, satisfied to play a passive part, and talkers, who might have been silent but for the spontaneous flow of wit and humour which

sparkled up within them, and would not be suppressed.

The evening was soft and balmy, and far into the night they lingered in the pleasant gardens, gazing on the broad quivering line of silver traced by the moon's rays on the tranquil river ; and almost forgetting that so near to them the tumult of the great world's Fair was at its height, and that the sounds of all kinds of music were summoning blind idolaters to worship the images which the queens of fashion had set up.

CHAPTER XIII.

COMING SORROW.

THE next event of real importance which is to be recorded as having taken place at Hazel Combe, was the birth of Bessie's child. The which important personage was a girl—a little to the Rector's regret, when a young lady was announced to him on one autumn morning as having made her appearance at the old Hall.

Sir Matthew did not share in his old friend's disappointment. He liked little girls, he honestly confessed. They were so good and quiet, while boys—— but the worthy man rarely continued the comparison ; for, as he was wont to remark, children were sent as blessings, at least we are taught so, and we should be grateful for all that Providence sees fit to bestow.

Johnnie had been very anxious during the period of his wife's trial ; and a certain dulness, symptomatic of his old morbid state of feeling, crept over him during her somewhat prolonged

convalescence. There was a want of cheerful variety in his days, and as for his nights, whether it was that after the fitful fever of politics he did not sleep well, or whether he was haunted through the watches of the night by visions of the wild wizard called Ambition, the fact is patent that when Bessie once more resumed her old habits in the household, she found a very different "Johnnie" from the one in whose companionship she had so lately delighted.

"We cannot do without you, my dear," said Sir Matthew, with a sigh. "I don't know how it is, we grew dull directly we began to talk; and Johnnie seemed to want you every moment."

"Wait till he finds that little Rosamond has no more resemblance to a Chimpanzee than all small monkeys of her age can boast of," said the Rector, when Bessie confided her disappointment to her oldest friend. "He has been bewildering his brains with his old theories again, and requires a little cheerful reality to drive away the cobwebs. To your work again, my darling; we are not born to be idle, and in Johnnie's health of mind consists your own best chance of happiness."

Bessie did not require much stimulus to exer-

tion when any benefit to her husband was in question ; and if it *were* sometimes an effort to tear herself from her little Rosamond's congenial society, and if she *did* not unfrequently deny herself the pleasure of dwelling (as the darling advanced in babyhood) on her daughter's precocious witticisms, why she had her reward in Johnnie's return to his old self, and in the consciousness that she was all in all to him whom she loved best on earth.

And so the time passed on. Not wholly in the retirement of Hazel Combe, for again a short session summoned Johnnie and his wife to London ; but still with little variety to break the happy monotony of their existence.

Suppose, then, an uneventful twelvemonth to have elapsed since Santland and his adopted child wandered under the shadow of the oaks in the beauteous suburban park, and imagine them at Hazel Combe again—at Hazel Combe, where the sun is shining brightly on the new-mown hay, and where everything around them speaks of gladness and prosperity.

It was late in the afternoon, and the shadows were beginning to lengthen, when the party from the Combe sallied forth into the hay-scented meadows. There was Sir Matthew, still upright

and active, although his three-score years had more than passed away ; there was the Rector, on whom time had told more heavily, but whose enjoyment of rural sights and scents was no less keen than in his boyhood. But first, and most important in the group—first in her cheerfulness, and in her sweet womanly efforts to promote the happiness of all around her, was Bessie Fendall. On her bright face care had not set one letter of its “crooked autograph ;” and those with whom she dwelt had learned to look to her, as though instinctively, as to the source and spring from which they drew their purest daily pleasures.

“Where is the Rosa Mundi ?” asked Santland, who already doated upon Bessie’s laughing, healthy baby. “She should be playing in the hay this glorious evening.”

“Catherine took her into the Nut-tree Lane : she is very careful of Miss Rosa’s complexion ; but I wish she would return, for the dew is beginning to fall, and the dear little woman has been out long enough.”

Mrs. Fendall was walking between the Rector and her husband. She was attired, as indeed were all the party, in deep mourning, for Colonel Matthew’s wife was dead—had died “at

the Hills," away from her country and kindred, and from the husband whose lightness of heart and "jollity" of character rendered him more agreeable as a friend than reliable as a relative.

"So you think that the child has been out too long?" asked Johnnie, who, the very reverse in all things of his thoughtless brother, was ever watchful to spare his wife even a moment's uneasiness. "Well! I suppose I must go in search of the small truant. However, I won't claim merit where none is due, for I was on the point of setting off to see how the workmen are progressing at the Ivy Cottage, where, ten to one, the instinct of a nursery maid has conducted Mrs. Catherine for a gossip."

Bessie, well as she was accustomed to Johnnie's quiet little attentions, had never grown to take them as a matter of course, and a pretty smile was, therefore, his reward, as, with a happy face, and a farewell gesture of his hand, he left them on his parental errand.

"I hardly know what to make of this Indian news," said Sir Matthew, as he seated himself by his daughter-in-law on a heap of fragrant hay. "It will be very pleasant to have little Frederica among us, and yet I almost wonder that Mrs.

Vansittart has not expressed a wish to bring up the child. Her only daughter's little girl,—it would seem so very natural."

"Perhaps she will do so," said Bessie, "when she has inspected poor little Rica. Mrs. Vansittart would never adopt an ugly, or what she would call an unpresentable, child. Fancy anything short of exquisite making contrast with all the well chosen elegances in Mrs. Vansittart's May Fair boudoir!"

"We seem to forget," said Santland, "that Colonel Fendall may, on his return, desire to provide a home for Miss Frederica. Colonel Matthew has disproved the unpopular fallacy that he is not a marrying man, and we may yet have the satisfaction of seeing him in the new light of a devoted paterfamilias, setting a bright example of all the domestic virtues."

Sir Matthew sighed.

"I never hope," he rejoined, "to see my eldest son again living quietly at Hazel Combe! What did I say? Again! Why, he never has lived quietly in the home which will one day be his since the time when he was an innocent, good boy—before he went to Eton—and learned, to the best of my belief, nothing but to be ashamed that God had given him a heart."

"If he had ever possessed that thing of doubtful good," muttered the Rector to himself, "he would not have been ashamed of it." And then aloud, "It is a new character for Master Myles to appear in—dry-nurse to his small half-sister! He will play it well, we may be sure. Myles never makes mistakes, and little Rica——"

"Will be as blooming as our Rosamond, I trust, when she arrives at Hazel Combe," interrupted Bessie, cheerfully, and with the view of changing the conversation, for she was often a little vexed by her guardian's too evident jealousy of her brother-in-law's children—a jealousy which she was herself so little capable of understanding.

For a short while longer they remained seated at the foot of the spreading oak, and Mrs. Fendall, seeing that the haymakers were gradually leaving the scene of their labours, was beginning to wonder rather anxiously at the non-appearance of the nurse and child, when Santland, partly to divert her attention from that engrossing subject, began talking of the improvement at the Ivy Cottage, which Johnnie Fendall had left them to inspect.

"It wanted repair sadly," he said; "and as

for the garden—the pretty garden that poor Hannum used to take such pride in—‘the thistles, and nettles, and darnels dank’ have grown up where the roses and the lilies used to bloom. Poor Hannum! I wonder whether he still lives to sorrow over the great tragedy of his ruined, blighted home. Years have passed, I believe, since Mary Hannum has heard anything of her father. All promised well for his future prosperity and contentment, when she, like an excellent daughter as she is, procured him that small grant of land in Upper Canada, and paid his passage to the land of promise, It is five years now since I saw Mary Hannum, and then she had been many months ‘without a line’ (she said) from her poor father.”

“He may be dead,” said Bessie, in a low voice. “He may have forgotten all his misery in the grave. It was a fearful tragedy, and I sometimes wonder how much—— Ah,” she added, suddenly, interrupting herself, “there she is!”

She could be no other than Bessie’s child, and as the “wee toddling thing” came towards its mother with extended arms, and crowing shout of joy, no wonder that the long past sorrows of the injured gardener were forgotten, and that

sufficient for the moment seemed, to Mrs. Fendall, the pleasure thereof.

Very happy for a while was Bessie, as she watched her laughing, rosy child, rolling in the fragrant hay, and hiding its fair curls under the light heaps which *she*, entering fully into the sport, tossed over her little darling's head.

Sir Matthew and the Rector looked on in placid contentment at the pretty sight, nay, so interested were they in watching the tiny Rosa's gambols, that the last haymaker had left the field before they perceived that *their* group alone remained upon the now almost deserted meadow.

"It is growing late," said Sir Matthew, "nearly eight o'clock. I wonder what has become of Johnnie."

Bessie rose from the grass on which she had been seated, and tying on her baby's hat said, "Is it so late? How busy we have been, and where, as you say, is Johnnie? Catherine, did you see your master?" she asked, addressing the nurse, who had already taken Rosamond in her arms, preparatory to their departure.

"I did not, ma'am," answered Catherine. "I came from the Rectory side, where I had been

walking with Miss Rosamond under the elm-trees."

"It is very strange," murmured Bessie, "it is much more than an hour since he left us."

"Two," thought Santland, but he said nothing; not that he had any particular motive for his reticence, only a kind of instinct to save Bessie from needless anxiety prompted him to silence.

"Let us walk towards the Ivy Cottage," suggested Bessie, and her proposition being silently acceded to, they bent their steps towards the narrow lane, in which stood what had once been the under-gardener's cottage.

When they had traversed about half the field, at the further extremity of which was the entrance to the lane, they perceived a man getting over the stile which lay directly in their path. He was old apparently, for his beard, which he wore long, was almost white, and he stooped greatly as he walked rapidly towards them.

"What a strange looking being," exclaimed Bessie, who was leaning on Santland's arm; but the latter made no reply, for he was gazing with an interest, which almost partook of fascination, at the advancing figure.

On it came, gesticulating violently with extended hands, and on those hands (Santland could see it plainly as the man advanced) there was the trace of blood !

They did not stop him, as he passed them by, but as he went muttering on his way, a kind of dread, to which they could give no name, stole over them.

"Who can he be?" asked Bessie, and her voice trembled, although she knew not why.

Santland turned his head back to look upon the stranger.

"I have not an idea," he rejoined, "but I don't like his looks. Walk on with Sir Matthew, Bessie, and I will try and find out who he is."

He left them as he spoke, and Bessie with her companion turned into the lane, now darkened by the approach of night, and by the meeting of the thick foliage overhead.

At every moment Bessie hoped that they would hear Johnnie's footsteps, and his welcome voice !

She could not have accounted for the fact, for she was not anxious—no, of course she was not anxious—what an absurd idea ! But, certainly,

she had never longed so for the sound of his dear voice before.

They walked on in silence—the summer air perhaps oppressed them, or they were tired after the day's great heat, and when they came at last to the deserted, empty cottage, they sat down within the rustic porch (Hannum had built it years before of some rough timber, and it was falling to pieces now), and thought that they would rest themselves awhile.

"He must have gone home the other way," said Sir Matthew, breaking a silence which was growing rather oppressive. "You see he evidently has not been here—the house is closely locked up; he must have fallen in with some one, and——"

"Ah, yes! I am sure he has," cried Bessie, catching up the idea. "One of Clarice de Berny's little girls, most likely; and he will bring her home to tea. Let us go home, dear father—let us go home at once, for we shall find him there, and we will scold him too for giving us this fright so thoughtlessly."

They hurried to the Combe—Bessie quite recovered from her momentary depression, and thinking of the loving rebuke which she would give to him who never, in her married life, had

caused her knowingly one moment's pain. They hurried home, but there was no husband waiting her return—only Santland standing beneath the portico, and asking, with a voice which he strove in vain to render unconcerned, whether they had seen anything of Johnnie.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE WAS JOHNNIE?

Who can attempt to describe the hours of suspense which followed on that heavy shock of disappointment? Night fell upon the earth, and still the search for the one whose unaccountable absence was filling all minds with an as yet unexpressed foreboding, was continued fruitlessly.

"Where can he be? Oh! where *can* he be?" was poor Bessie's almost incessant exclamation, as, bareheaded, she paced along the avenue, wringing her hands—for her self-command at times seemed almost to desert her—and inquiring, but in vain, of every one she met, for news of Johnnie.

"Oh, Guardie—my own Guardie," she implored, with the piteous pleading of a trusting child, "do not leave me! See, it is twelve o'clock, and—and—I have a dreadful fear that—that he may be ill—may be—Oh, God!

I do not know what I fear: but only do not leave me! If you ever loved me, do not leave me now!"

He took her hands within his own, and held them fast. He knew how strong had grown her habit of obedience to his wishes, and that now, if ever, was the moment to test his power over her mind.

"Bessie," he said, "be still! Keep quiet, child, for one short hour, and—so help me God!—I will return with tidings of your husband."

The moon was shining brightly over the topmost branches of the trees, when the Rector of Combe Hatton stood before the door of the small cottage which had once been Joseph Hannum's.

He was not alone, for beside him, examining the door-lock, was the village smith, while two other men, armed with constables' staves, were stationed within a few yards of the cottage.

"It is a quarter past twelve," said Santland to himself, as the distant chime rung out from the church tower of Hillingstone. "A quarter past twelve, and I have promised to return by one. Penfold—make haste," he said aloud, addressing the smith; "I have no time to lose, and we may have much to do."

The lock was soon wrenched, and then, it being almost as light as day, the three men went into the house.

There was nothing in the down-stairs parlour, into which the moonlight streamed through the large latticed window—nothing in the darker kitchen, with its bare walls and empty fire-place—nothing on the narrow stairs, which led up to two bedrooms, in which the gardener and his family, long years ago, were wont to sleep; but when they came to the small front bedroom, the pretty room where Annie—she who had been her father's pride—had rested for seventeen short years in her sweet, childlike purity—when they came, I say, to that dismantled, bare, unhome-like place, they saw a sight which told at once the fate of him they sought.

On the floor, on the planks which glittered with a ghostly blueness in the moonlight, lay the lifeless form of Johnnie Fendall! Very still and quiet he lay there—the victim of another's crime; and Santland, as he gazed upon the motionless corpse of Bessie's husband, knew that the man whom he had so lately seen with blood upon his hands, and muttering strange words in his revengeful ravings, was he who, by Matthew Fendall's crime, had been bereft of

God's most precious gift of reason, and who, guided by an instinct urging him on to vengeance, had done that dreadful deed.

Many a year had passed since Santland, after Hannum's murderous attack upon Colonel Fendall, had seen the man whose wrongs were now so fearfully, and, alas! so unjustly avenged; and now—now, when, 'like a wolf that has smelt a dead child out,' the terrible and dangerous being had come home to satiate his fury—Santland could readily believe (corroborated as the suspicion was by his own returning recollection of the man) in the identity of the murderer.

What had passed in that now silent chamber, where he whose life had been so blameless lay with glazed and widely opened eyes in the soft moonlight, was a secret only known to Him who seeth all things: and the Rector, as for a moment he stood beside that motionless form, pondered on the endless mystery of the ways of Providence.

"Why," he murmured to himself, "should the wicked remain and flourish, whilst the good are taken early away?—crushed down, even as the field of corn that is laid prostrate by the blast, while the tall and noxious weeds that grow amongst it remain standing proudly erect

in seeming defiance of the judgments of their God."

Only for an instant did Santland moralise on that sad spectacle, for the one prevailing idea regained again the mastery over him, and repeating to himself his promise to Bessie that another hour should see him returned to Hazel Combe, he gave the orders necessary for the watching over the body.

The men were whispering together in eager and yet awe-stricken tones, when the Rector bade one of them hurry to the nearest house and obtain a woman's aid in wrapping up poor Johnnie's corpse.

"You will remain here beside it till I return, or till you hear from me," he said; and then, sick at heart, and with steps that faltered strangely, he descended the cottage stairs.

He walked through the narrow lane as in a dream. He had a painful consciousness of the dreadful task he had before him, and yet how, and best to do it, he asked himself in vain.

It had become his terrible duty to strike what might prove a death-blow to the only being whom on earth he loved. He had to impart to Bessie that the husband who was so unspeakably dear to her would never, as a

living, sentient being, cross the threshold of her home again ; and that never more would she see her little Rosa clasped in the tender father's arms, while *she*, in the fullness of her mother's joy, clapped her glad hands in answer to the happy infant's shout of triumph.

It was Santland's awful task to bring home such bitter truths as these to his poor Bessie's heart, and his own sunk within him as he drew a mental picture of her agony.

The giant shadows of the aged trees were stretching far upon the moonlit lawn, and on the grass were many men and women, talking eagerly. But the Rector knew that Bessie would not be amongst them, for his patient ward would do his bidding to the last, and where the old man was, weeping and sorrowing for his son, there would she be likewise.

"And she will trust in Heaven, and stay upon her God," were the words with which he strove to comfort himself, as the clock struck one, and Bessie Fendall, with dilated eyes and a face from which every vestige of colour had faded away, started up on her guardian's entrance to learn the dreadful truth that she was a widow !

CHAPTER XV.

VENGEANCE IS MINÈ.

MANY a year has passed away since the occurrence of the awful event recorded in the last chapter, and now another and a still fairer heroine has usurped the place of her whose summer of life is at an end.

The fair Rosamond, Bessie Fendall's daughter, who has just passed her seventeenth birthday, is with her friend and cousin Laura de Berny, discussing a coming event, which, almost unknown to herself, is beginning to cast a shadow over Rosamond's spirit, rendering the prospect of her future life less serenely bright than it had been before.

The two girls—Laura was Lord Westerham's youngest grand-daughter—were riding, followed by a groom, on the smooth, short turf of Witham Down. There was but little difference between Rosamond's age and that of the De Berny's, and they had ever been intimate, for the

kind, cheerful old people at Westerham Abbey enjoyed the sight and society of the young, and had almost adopted as their own the two merry little daughters of Clarice de Berny, who was too much addicted to Parisian pleasures to trouble herself much about either their education or their morals.

Hortense, the elder of the two girls, had already danced, and laughed, and flirted through one London season ; for Lady Westerham, in spite of her sixty years and upwards, was not sorry for an excuse to enter again into the gaieties of the world ; and her lord—albeit he would shrug his shoulders, and complained, with mock self-commiseration, that *les diners se suivent, et ne se ressemblent pas*—found no bad excuse in many a London banquet for forgetting that he was old enough to take care of himself.

They were little, bright, coquettish-looking things, “ the De Berny girls,” as the world called them ; not exactly pretty, but with a pleasant *aplomb*, which no one ever thought of calling forwardness, and a fund of the family good spirits which made them wonderfully popular.

“ There is nothing like a thoroughly happy home for turning girls out into the world with sunny faces, such as those two possess.”

“ You are quite right, and yet I would not change one thoughtful smile of Rosa’s for all the merry peals of laughter of the De Bernys.”

The speakers were the Rector of Combe Hatton—now an old man, with hair almost silvery white—and Mrs. Fendall, both pleased listeners to the sounds of cheerful girlish voices which issued from an adjoining room.

Mrs. Fendall—the dear Aunt Bessie, as the Anglo-French girls called her, although, in truth, her husband had been but a distant cousin—was now in her fortieth year, and for one who had not watched on her person the progress of Time, it would have been hard to recognise in that altered woman the Rector’s once happy and sanguine-natured ward.

There was scarcely a trace remaining of the beauty which had once distinguished her, for the clear brown complexion had changed to an unvarying sallowness, and her features, always rather strongly marked, had grown—so extreme was her attenuation—to appear almost exaggerated in their dimensions. Only her eyes were beautiful—“ beautiful with all the soul’s expansion,” beaming from a face which in every feature showed a patient resignation and a hope which was not of this fleeting world.

That Bessie had not succumbed to the terrible blow which had been dealt to her in her husband's sudden death, was owing in part, perhaps, to her healthy physical organisation, but chiefly, under Providence, to the first great habit of her life—namely, the sacrificing of her own will and wishes to the happiness of others.

To her—and well she knew the truth—did the poor bereaved father look for such comfort as could yet remain to him on earth; and had not the experience of past years convinced her that, without her, her guardian's life would be blank?

So, after the first great shock of isolation had been overcome, Bessie rose up from her couch of suffering with the brave resolve—God only knew how great the effort was!—to do her duty in her loneliness as a Christian woman should. She resolved to do that duty, remembering that—

“ In the world's broad field of battle
She must be a hero in the strife !”

And verily she found, even in this life, her exceeding great reward.

The death of poor Johnnie had been promptly followed by the arrest of his murderer, whose acquittal, on the ground of insanity, and imprisonment for life, were the inevitable results of his

trial. Of his identity with the almost forgotten Hannum the public remained in ignorance.

As will readily be believed, the assassination of his darling Bessie's husband, and the approaching return of Myles with a little rival (as he feared the child might prove) to Rosamond in her grandfather's affections, had not tended to increase Santland's charitable feelings towards Colonel Matthew and his belongings.

Then, also, intelligence had lately reached Hazel Combe that "the noisy, blustering Colonel"—Santland never could endure the sound of Matthew's loud voice—would in another month be on his way home to England, there to enjoy in prosperity and peace the blessings of elder-sonship. This was no pleasant reflection to the Rector, whose dreams of ambition had lately been transferred from Bessie to centre themselves in Bessie's child. But he might have spared himself the sin of coveting for another the good things possessed either by Colonel Fendall or his son; for before little Frederica had been two years at Hazel Combe, her father fell mortally wounded at the battle of Sobraon, and Myles, worse than penniless,—for the Colonel died in debt,—became a dependant on his grandfather's bounty for his daily bread.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT ROSAMOND.

You never told to me, dear Rosamond, why Rica quitted you when she was a little girl; and, if her grandmother was desirous to possess her, why did she not go at once to the old lady, when she first came from India?"

"It is a strange story, and Mrs. Vansittart was a strange person. Besides, there are money mysteries mixed up with it," answered Rosamond, who—it may be well to mention here—had grown up into a strikingly graceful girl, tall and slight, with all the beauty of complexion which her mother had lacked, but with less of that regularity of feature for which Bessie had, in her youthful days, been so remarkable.

Laura shrugged her pretty shoulders at the mention of money matters.

"We won't talk about what people call business," she said, "and we have not the time for a

long story, Rosa dear; but there is one thing I want to know, and which you can tell me in just two words—will Rica be the *héritière* of the grandmother? Was she rich—that capricious dame? and did she leave all her money to *La Petite*?”

“She had nothing to leave, I fancy,” responded Rosamond. “I heard that Mrs. Vansittart sank all her money in an annuity, to spite poor Grandpapa.”

“Sank her money?” said Laura, whose black eyes opened wide with amazement. “Where did she bury it, and why did that *agacer*—what you call it—tease that good Sir Matthew?”

“Oh! that is part of the long story,” said Rosamond, beginning a laughing explanation, which her versatile companion scarcely listened to; for, taking advantage of a quarter of a mile of springy turf, she put her horse into a gallop, and the two girls, out of breath and with flushed cheeks, from which the wind had blown their glossy hair, checked their ponies at length on the summit of Witham Down.

“What fun!” said Laura, “but not a word to grannie. She is so afraid that Emperor will hear the sound of the railway whistle and throw me above his head. You won’t tell, Rosy,

darling?" she added, coaxingly, for she saw an ominous look of hesitation in her friend's honest face.

"Yes, I will," said the latter, bluntly, "if you don't promise me, *foi de demoiselle*, that this is the very last time you will ever, to the best of your knowledge and belief, disobey a command of Lady Westerham."

Poor little Laura looked, as indeed she felt, terribly abashed at this unexpected rebuke. She had not been exclusively accustomed to the intimate companionship of those who considered a concealment and a subterfuge as first cousins to that ugly thing—a *lie*, and Rosamond's grave face struck her with consternation.

"Answer quick, dear," said the latter, holding up her little whip, with a pretty gesture of playful menace. "Give me the promise, which I know you will keep; for my mother wishes me to be at home in time to welcome Rica, and I have left myself but twenty minutes for the canter home."

Laura's countenance brightened considerably under the influence of her cousin's livelier tone, and having given the required promise, the two girls, after an affectionate kiss had been ex-

changed (a proof of friendship rendered difficult by the impatience of "their diminutive steeds"), went on their respective ways—Rosamond turning her pony's head in the direction of Hazel Combe, whilst Laura pursued her way, accompanied by the groom, to Westerham Abbey.

A very quiet, staid old pony, when not led astray by the evil example of younger and less-experienced companions, was *Bas de Soie*—so called from four silky, small white legs, which its mistress, in spite of the animadversions of certain sporting gentlemen of her acquaintance, persisted in viewing with unmixed admiration. A very quiet pony, in truth, was the little animal, which had carried her since she was ten years old, and had never committed an act calculated to destroy the confidence which had been reposed in him; so Bessie's daughter, all precious though she was, had been permitted, through several summers past and gone, to ride alone about the lanes and park on *Bas de Soie*, between whom and his young mistress there existed a close and tender friendship.

"I hope I shall be in time," the young girl murmured to herself, as the sure-footed animal trotted down the rather steep slope of the hill; and then, as her quick eye caught sight of a faint

line of smoke above the distant trees, she added aloud—

“Ah! there’s the train—the train that she will come by! Come, *Bas de Soie*, old friend, your best foot forward now! We must not disappoint mamma.” And touching the little animal lightly with her whip, he broke—for he was going home, the cunning fellow—into a rapid canter.

The fresh October wind was blowing in fair Rosamond’s face, and painting it with brighter roses, as she rode swiftly onwards—onwards, through the narrow sandy lane where, years before, the lunatic, escaped from durance, had received the blow which had gone so near to be his death-stroke! Onwards, through another broader road, and past the place—the cottage had been long since levelled with the ground—where her own father lay, on that bright summer night, a murdered corpse!

Of the particulars of the tragical event by which she had been made an orphan, Rosamond had, by the incessantly watchful care of those around her, been kept in happy ignorance. But although Mrs. Fendall had succeeded in concealing from her daughter the dreadful fact that the father who had died when his only child was

but an infant had met with a violent end, she could not, with all her caution, prevent the infusion of a certain element of mystery into the air which the young girl, from her infancy, had breathed. There was mystery felt, although uncomplained of, in the silence maintained by all around her concerning the last illness and the parting whispers of her father ; there was mystery in her mother's looks, and, above all, in her evidently insurmountable objection to a certain walk or drive—the prettiest one about the place, in Rosamond's opinion—namely, the pleasant Nut-tree Lane, where, in the summer time, the shade was thickest, and the nightingales sang so sweetly by the glow-worm's tiny light ; and there was mystery in many an ominous shake of old Sir Matthew's whitened head, as he and Mr. Santland (who, in Rosamond's judgment, was even more inexplicable than the rest) held secret converse together on subjects of which *she* had evidently no cognizance.

To contrast the effects likely to be produced on a sensitive organisation by the not over cheerful atmosphere of her home, Mrs. Fendall had always greatly encouraged Rosamond's intimacy with her Westerham Abbey cousins ; and, doing violence to her own almost morbid longing

for privacy and retirement, she had, during the past twelvemonth, induced Sir Matthew to open his doors to such among their country neighbours as would, in her opinion, tend to neutralize on her darling Rosamond the effect of her home's monotony.

The object of so much tender solicitude had not proved herself unworthy of the engrossing affection of those with whom her life was passed; for the garment of her mother's rare unselfishness had descended upon her, and with it that wondrous warmth of heart and tenderness of feeling which, even as in poor Bessie's case, were likely to work her daughter evil in the time to come.

CHAPTER XVII.

RICA'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

"I HAVE returned in time, you see, dear mother," said Rosamond, in a pretty, boastful tone, as, with the skirt of her long riding-habit thrown over her arm, she stepped softly along the floor of her mother's morning room—very softly, for Mrs. Fendall had (so gradually and uncomplainingly that the sad truth was scarcely even suspected) sunk into that much-to-be-pitied thing, a chronic invalid, with shattered nerves and vanquished courage—a courage of which only enough remained to enable her to hide within her breast the secret, suspected by but one other—namely, that her days on earth were numbered ; and that the time was not far distant when, by the side of him whom she had so dearly loved, her life-long sorrow would be at last forgotten.

"Mother, I hear the carriage-wheels! You see that I am in good time to welcome Frederica!"

and Rosamond, before she hurried out again to greet her cousin, pressed a fond kiss upon her mother's forehead, and wiped away a tear which was rolling slowly down her pale, wan cheek.

"You must not be flurried, Minnie dear,"—*Minnie* had long been the pet name by which Rosamond had called her mother—"you must not be flurried. Rica is only a girl, you know. By the way," she added, mentally, as she stood at the hall-door, "I think that I shall call her 'Freddy;' it sounds less grand, but far more cheery; yes, I think that we will certainly call her Freddy."

The object of this short soliloquy was in the meantime slowly approaching the house, in the old cumbrous "fly," which had conveyed her and her companion, an elderly female servant, from the Witham railway station.

There was a slight elevation in the ground at the spot on which the mansion stood, so that Rosamond had time to catch a side view of the rather pretty face which showed its profile at the carriage window. She looked, and she admired, admired more during that comparatively short investigation than she did again throughout long after years of intimate companionship; for Frederica Fendall's countenance, although it

would have been hard to assign a reason wherefore, was not one which kept the promise held out by its first "taking" aspect.

She was very small and low in stature, with the tiniest hands and feet—they were her chief beauties—in the world. Amongst her acquaintances, there were some—principally the female ones—who pronounced Rica Fendall to be a pretty girl; but even those who did so would have been puzzled by the analysis of her claims to admiration. They would say, probably, that her eyes were good—they were large, and of a clear, cold blue; and that they liked a little *nez retroussé*. Moreover, they might have praised, with truth, her hair, which was abundant, and had a pretty golden gloss upon it; added to which valuable gifts, it might have been cited that she possessed a well-shaped, plump little figure, and that, generally speaking—a circumstance which may, in part, account for her sex's enthusiasm as regarded Miss Frederica Fendall—gentlemen were very apt to pass by the *mignonne* creature without paying her the compliment of even a passing look.

"Dear Rica," cried the warm-hearted Rosamond, as she threw her arms round her cousin, and kissed the cold cheek which the latter

inclined towards her ; “ dear Rica, I am so glad you are come ! I never should have known you.”

It was a foolish remark, certainly, but it scarcely deserved to be punished by a short sarcastic little laugh—a laugh which reminded Rosamond of Myles—and by a remark to the effect that it would have been strange if they had remembered each other, inasmuch as they had not met since both had been put into short clothes.

“ Mrs. Fendall is at home, I suppose ? ” continued the young lady, as, after carefully smoothing out her crape and bombazine, she followed Rosamond through the spacious entrance-hall, and along the dark solemn library into Mrs. Fendall’s morning sitting-room.

“ She calls her ‘ Mrs. Fendall,’ ” thought Rosamond, with something of what the French call a *serrement de cœur*. “ Ah ! I am well punished for my half jealous feelings ; for darling Minnie will not even be Aunt Bessie to Frederica ; and I need not have so greatly feared a sharer in hers and dear grandpapa’s affections.”

But, although Rica’s manner might be deficient in the warmth and tenderness which Rosamond—the foolish child !—considered as amongst the

almost necessary elements of social existence, yet Mrs. Vansittart's grand-daughter soon contrived to win herself a place, and that not an unimportant one, in the good graces of her relations.

"She has very pretty ways with her, my dear," remarked good old Sir Matthew, after Rica had been a week at the Combe, and had striven, with considerable success, to render herself agreeable; "very pretty ways with her, indeed, and has a great deal to say. I was very much pleased with her nice stories this morning when she walked along the terrace with me."

Sir Matthew, who had now nearly reached his eightieth year, was a healthy, and, for his time of life, a vigorous old man. The infirmities of age had crept upon him by very stealthy footsteps; so stealthy, indeed, were they, that but for his snow-white hair, and for the slower pace than heretofore with which Sir Matthew walked about the farm or park, none would have remembered that well-nigh fourscore years had passed above his head.

None, perhaps, but Frederica; but with her the fact was ever present, whether, as was so frequently the case, she devoted herself exclusively to her grandfather's entertainment, or chatted, with seeming unconcern, with her aunt and

cousin on the important events of every-day occurrence.

“Rica seems devoted to her brother,” was Mrs. Fendall’s rejoinder to Sir Matthew’s praise of his elder grand-daughter’s conversational powers.

“Yes; it is very nice to see how proud she is of him. And well she may be!—he has seen a great deal of service, and has got on well!”

“Got on!” repeated the Rector of Combe Hatton, who was present, and who never lost an opportunity of having what he called a “hit” at Myles. “Ah! that is the very word to use when speaking of our young Lieutenant-Colonel! Others, who have had the good fortune to survive these desperate battles, are spoken of as having ‘distinguished themselves’—and some—some, did I say?—many, thank God, of that small army of martyrs, have come forth as ‘heroes’ from the fight; while Colonel Myles—but it will quite content him—has ‘got on!’ Ugh! It is small praise to give a soldier, and I wish him joy of it.” And Santland, whose cynicism had increased as years began to tell upon him, walked slowly, and as Rica would have thought, sulkily away, with his hands behind his back, and brooding moodily.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLONEL FENDALL'S WELCOME.

THE time passed slowly on—slowly, and worse than slowly for those who, like Rica Fendall, had a loved relation exposed to the dangers of the far-famed siege—but at last peace was proclaimed, and Europe felt that it might breathe again a better, healthier breath than that of wars and tumults.

From the first opening scene of the campaign against the Russians, to the final falling of the curtain over the strong Crimean fortress, Myles had taken an active part in every engagement, and had done his duty in the trenches with the rest. He had been very fortunate, and was coming home, if not exactly smothered in laurels, yet with a sprig, so to speak, of that lustrous evergreen in his button-hole—and with the prestige of a *youngish* Lieutenant-Colonel, who has “gone through the Crimean war,” with considerable satisfaction to himself, and with a

sufficient amount of credit (at least so far as might be guessed at) in public estimation.

There was to be a grand entertainment at Hazel Combe on the occasion of the Colonel's return. It is true that Sir Matthew was not fond of grand entertainments, and that he had at first turned a deaf ear to Rica's hints about Crimean heroes generally, and to her little insinuating reminders that every family throughout the length and breadth of the land who boasted a Crimean hero in their ranks had, to the best of that family's powers, celebrated the return from the wars of the "gallant defenders of their country's honour."

"There have been such dinners, and *fêtes*, and bonfires all over England for the officers who have come home," suggested Frederica; "and, dear grandpapa, I am sure you would like to welcome Myles in some way when he returns."

"But, my dear," said Sir Matthew, "I think that we can welcome your brother without *fêtes* and bonfires. We can have a dinner, of course, if you wish it. Yes, we will certainly have a dinner; and we can ask the Crutchleys, you know. They are always glad to come; and Tom Crutchley will drink Myles' health—I mean that he will propose it, and make a speech. He

makes a very good speech, does Tom Crutchley. I remember every one laughed very much at what he said when your poor dear uncle came into Parliament; and the girls are merry creatures too. By all means ask the Crutchleys," continued Sir Matthew, warming up with the new view which he had taken of the subject, and totally unconscious of the expression of intense disgust which had gradually spread itself over his grand-daughter's face.

To tell the truth, Sir Matthew, although the most excellent of old men, and a pattern for grandfathers in kindness and goodnature, had a not wholly unnatural dislike to being "put out of his way;" and, besides, there was about him a certain gentle selfishness (very excusable at fourscore), which had been brought to light and fostered by the entire self-abnegation of his womenkind.

"It is very hard," said Rica, when, greatly to her annoyance, she found herself compelled to enlist her unpretending cousin in her cause—"very hard indeed, I think, when Myles has been away so long, incurring fearful dangers and fighting with such indomitable courage, that he is only to be complimented by a speech from a Tom Crutchley! Tom Crutchley, indeed!" she

repeated, with a curl of her short upper lip—
“a wretched country apothecary——”

“But he married our cousin,” put in Rosamond, gently; “and he is so kind and attentive when any one is ill.”

“I suppose he sends in his bill for medicine and attendance as they all do,” said Rica; “but that is nothing to the purpose. I am sure, dear Rosamond, that you must see how wrong it would be, and how very hard upon poor Myles, if he were to have no better ovation, after all he has gone through, than a prosy speech from a vulgar apothecary about defending our hearths, and all that sort of commonplace thing. I declare, for my part, that I would almost rather he never came home at all.”

Rosamond was very sorry for her cousin's disappointment. It is true that she could not quite approve of Rica's tone when speaking of the unaffected, unassuming Crutchleys; but Rosamond was one who could make allowances for temper when the heart's best affections are wounded. And it was certainly mortifying—she could well understand that, to have a darling brother welcomed back to his home with such scant ceremony.

So Rosamond set herself to the work of per-

suading "grandpapa" for once to be hospitable on a grand scale, and to give a *fête* worthy of a Crimean hero.

"Well, my dear, since you wish it," the old man said at last with a patient sigh; "but you know it never was the custom in my poor mother's time, and, somehow, I and the house seem too old to change."

"But grandpapa, dear, you had no Crimean heroes in those days," enjoined Rosamond, coaxingly.

"Not Crimean, my dear, but Peninsular; and I remember—"

But the reader's patience shall not be tried by a repetition of Sir Matthew's reminiscences. It is sufficient to say that Rosamond, thankful for the concession she had obtained, listened with exemplary endurance to certain lengthy stories at third hand, which her grandfather was in the frequent habit of repeating to the family: and that when she was at last released, her first feeling—after making known her success to to Rica—was, that the latter showed a very insufficient amount of gratitude for the boon which had been accorded to her.

CHAPTER XIX.

COLONEL FENDALL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

MYLES FENDALL, at this momentous period of his life, was just entering on his thirty-seventh year. He looked several years younger than his age, by reason, partly, of his slight and almost boyish figure; to which cause may be added the fact that his "head of auburn hair" was singularly luxuriant, whilst his display of beard and whiskers was deficient in proportion.

On the whole he had certainly considerably improved in personal appearance during the last sixteen years of his busy restless life; for his complexion was bronzed by exposure, and a certain not altogether unsoldierlike bearing redeemed his short stature from its former insignificance. His return was welcomed by his sister with an amount of rapture which Rosamond had hardly believed her capable of feeling; and Mrs. Fendall, when she saw how warmly Myles could be beloved, took herself severely to task for her

own lukewarmness of regard towards her husband's nephew.

To say that Colonel Fendall's expected return from the wars excited much enthusiasm in the neighbourhood of Hillingstone would be impossible. For, in the first place, he was not personally popular, and in the next, he had no "standing" in the county; although it was well known—at least quite *as* well known as opulent country gentlemen's affairs usually are—that the Hazel Combe property was not entailed, and that therefore it was at the option of Sir Matthew to make amends to his only grandson for the misfortune of his birth.

But while the county generally was aware that it only depended on Sir Matthew to make Colonel Fendall a man of importance, and a rich *parti* for any young lady willing to waive the question of *birth*, it was equally an established fact amongst those interested in the matter, that Hazel Combe, with its parks and farms, its fine old mansion, and its thriving tenants' houses, was devised to Rosamond Fendall, the daughter of Sir Matthew's younger son.

The old gentleman had made no secret of this arrangement, neither had he refused to give a

reason for what might at first sight appear in the light of an eccentricity.

"The blow which made poor Rosamond an orphan," Sir Matthew had said to his old friend the Rector, "was intended—and alas! not unjustly—for another. It is not therefore to the children of him who escaped that merited retribution that Hazel Combe shall descend; but, as some small amends, to her who so little deserved a fate so sad, I will bequeath the property of her ancestors."

It was not long after Frederica's arrival before she became perfectly cognizant of the mortifying fact that she was not an heiress. "But," as she sensibly wrote to "dearest Myles," "things often change, and wills amongst them; nor do I see any reason why Sir Matthew should adhere to this wicked act of injustice."

They kept up a very brisk correspondence, did Myles and Rica, indeed the latter seemed rather to object to any interference in her monopoly as letter-writer to the Colonel. Rosamond rather regretted this evidence of jealousy, for Myles was an entertaining correspondent, and Rosamond was in the habit, previous to Rica's arrival, of receiving many an amusing letter from the seat of war, which she would read

aloud for the recreation of their quiet domestic circle.

But whilst Frederica was thus making herself agreeable to the family at Hazel Combe, and while Sir Matthew, especially, was beginning to miss her pleasant lively society when any unforeseen occurrence prevented her from accompanying him in his daily walk, Mr. Santland—as might have been expected—remained proof against the kind of equivocal fascination which the elder Miss Fendall had contrived to throw over the household.

The weight of years or care, or probably the added burthen of both, had told severely on the Rector of Combe Hatton. He was now seventy-four, — nearly three years younger than Sir Matthew, but older by a score if we may be allowed to estimate age by the infirmities and weaknesses which follow in its train.

And yet it could not be said that Mr. Santland's bodily health was failing him, for he would still undertake, though he had ceased to enjoy, the distant country walks in which, during former years, he had been wont to take such infinite delight ; nor had he ceased to make periodical journeys to London, where, during his fortnights' absences from his rectory, he frequented as usual

his Literary Club, and associated as heretofore with the friends and acquaintances of his youth.

"I never saw any one so broke as old Santland is," was Myles' remark to his sister, two days after his arrival at Hazel Combe. "He used to be rather good fun sometimes in his cynical, sarcastic way, but now his temper seems to have got the ascendant, and he is neither more nor less than odious. Rosamond declares he felt old Shirly's death severely last year. Fancy feeling anything at eighty!"

"Have you noticed how curiously he watches Aunt Bessie?" asked his sister; she called Mrs. Fendall "Aunt Bessie" now, to please her grandfather, but it was under mental protest, for she, a Fendall and a Vansittart, nourished a supreme though secret contempt for the nameless widow, who gave herself no airs of superiority, and was simply a true-hearted honest woman, totally unsuspecting of the value set by her little niece on the advantages of birth and station.

"Noticed it!" repeated Myles; "haven't I? Do you know, Rica," he continued, with an air of mystery, which at once excited his sister's serious attention, "do you know that the more I see of old Santland, and of Mrs. John Fendall,

the more I am convinced that there is something more between them than we know of?"

"Nonsense! Do you really think so? That old man!" exclaimed Rica, her light blue eyes flashing with curiosity.

"Nonsense, indeed, in that way," responded Myles, laughing, for he was not one of those troublesome brothers who set a jealous watch over their sister's purity of mind. "Nonsense, as you say. Not that old men—however, that is neither here nor there. What I mean is, that the precious pattern of an Aunt Bessie is old Santland's daughter."

"O-o-h!" drawled Frederica, in an accent which savoured strongly of disappointment.

"And what is more," continued Myles, "I am convinced that my grandfather knows nothing of the matter."

"I do not think it would trouble him if he did," suggested Rica, "for he doats on Mrs. John, and she does toady him so awfully!"

"But if my grandfather knows nothing," again continued Myles, who seemed to take little heed for the moment of his sister's annotations—"if my grandfather is in ignorance of Mistress Bessie's birth and parentage, I will tell you who is not, and that is—Mr. Samuel

Earnshaw, the vulgar elderly gentleman who has lately taken possession of Parkfield House."

"He!—the retired attorney? My dearest Myles, what can have put such an idea into your head?"

"That is my secret," answered Myles, sententially; but seeing a petulant frown gathering on his sister's face, he hastened to explain away the seeming mystery, and to make his peace with one whose jealousy of his affection caused her to take offence with what was sometimes very inconvenient readiness.

CHAPTER XX.

FEMALE CURIOSITY.

FROM what has been recorded in the preceding chapter of Myles Fendall's *tête-à-tête* conversation with his sister, it will be seen that there were now two spies lurking unsuspected in the hitherto peaceful household of Hazel Combe ; and, moreover, that those spies were relations, whose natural shrewdness was stimulated by self-interest, and whose position was rendered doubly strong by the bond of entire affection which so evidently linked them to each other.

But whilst endeavouring to portray the characters of this singularly-attached brother and sister, I am far from wishing to convey the idea that both, or either, were monsters of deceit, cupidity, and treachery. In excuse for the deliberate plan formed by Frederica for the supplanting of her cousin, much might be urged, were it only that in the engrossing devotion which she felt for her brother was to be sought

and found the motives for her almost every action.

Then, too, Rica's bringing-up had had in it something which might be almost called *Bohemian*, so accustomed had she been from infancy to watch the shifts and subterfuges resorted to by her grandmother to maintain the appearance of wealth when the reality was wanting. For Rosamond, in common with the world at large, was signally at fault in supposing Mrs. Vansittart to be one of those on whom Fortune had been profuse of her pecuniary favours, inasmuch as the old lady was simply one of those innumerable "humbugs" of the world who attempt to purchase, by a reputation for riches, the consideration which their personal merits have failed to acquire for them.

It had been Mrs. Vansittart's hope and expectation, seeing that Rica grew up with some pretensions to beauty, that a rich marriage on the part of her grand-daughter would recompense her for the care and expense (Mrs. Vansittart was very fond of talking about expense) which she had incurred by undertaking the education of her penniless relation. Death, however, unexpected and remorseless, cut off the well-dressed, fashion-loving old lady before there had appeared

any chance that her dreams would be realised ; and Rica, disappointed and embittered, arrived at Hazel Combe only to find that there, also, and by her rich relation on her father's side, she ran every chance of being "forgotten in the will."

There was nothing surprising in the fact that Myles was all-in-all to his half-sister. From a little child she had been his petted plaything, and as she advanced in years there was no pleasure, no coveted enjoyment in his power to procure for her, which she did not owe to Myles' kindness and affection.

It was true he spoilt her, but that was not a sin for her to cavil at ; and if her acquaintance—some of them, at least—did consider her just a little selfish, what cared Frederica, as long as Myles was ready to indulge her every fancy, and that she—ah, there ! through all her little selfish, sensual tastes the woman's heart spoke out—and that she could plot and plan for *his* advancement, forgetting even her precious little self in her ardent desire for the worldly success of the brother she so dearly loved.

"Hortense, I want you to tell me all about Mr. Earnshaw," was Frederica's request to her half-French cousin, when she met the latter for

the first time after the conversation recorded in the last chapter.

Hortense burst into a low musical laugh at Rica's entreaty.

"What can I know about your Mons. Airneshaw?" she replied. "He is an old gentleman that I find common, and *vilain*—what you call ugly; and his daughter is vulgar, too, and dresses herself in all the colours of the rain——"

"Do you remember when he first came to Parkfield Lodge?"

"Yes; and I recollect well—and you, too, Laura," she added, addressing her sister—"how many questions Monsieur Airneshaw asked of grandpapa about the minister—I mean your *Mistaire* Santland."

"Yes," rejoined the voluble Laura; "and I recollect that *Mistaire* Santland called that day at the Abbey, and grew quite green and yellow when he found *Mistaire* Earnshaw there; and since that time we have all noticed how he watches poor Aunt Bessie—not the least as he used to do—not, I mean to say, as if he loved her very much, but as though there was something she could tell him which he wanted to find out."

“What can the mystery be?” exclaimed Rica; and “What can it all mean?” echoed her companions, although their motives for curiosity were widely different: the former being desirous of searching out for a weak point, a flaw, in poor Aunt Bessie’s feminine armour of defence, while the light-hearted and affectionate French girls were only fearful that some unknown sorrow was threatening to strike upon the heart of one who was endeared to them by many an act of untiring and unselfish affection.

CHAPTER XXI.

BESSIE HEARS THE TRUTH.

AND now it is time that I should say a few words regarding the Mr. Earnshaw whose advent had (for Hortense de Berny was quite justified in that assertion) so evidently disturbed the wonted equanimity of the Rector of Combe Hatton.

The residence known as Parkfield House was a good-sized Elizabethan building ; square, red, comfortable, and ugly. It stood just outside the town, and within a stone's throw of the road, from which it was fenced off by a low brick wall, fancifully adorned at either extremity with a rather dilapidated sphinx, whose eyes, anything but eternal, had long ceased to be the favourite mark for the stones of such small Hillingstone boys as had once delighted in levelling their natural weapons at the Parkfield House monsters.

Those good old days had now passed away,

for there were police at Hillingstone now, and a man in uniform, the terror of the idle *gamins* of the place, was to be seen, at times unfavourable for the pursuits of those lovers of mischief, walking, with his truncheon and defiant face, before the Parkfield sphinxes, and interfering greatly with the rights of public property.

Mr. Earnshaw was a widower, and his age might be something under seventy. He was a stout, red-faced man, with large bushy white whiskers, and with eyes singularly black and piercing. His eyebrows also were very dark and overhanging, so that, take him altogether, the appearance of the retired attorney was more singular than pleasing.

Mrs. Earnshaw was many years younger than her husband, whom she had married for the very common reason that she wanted a home, and that he appeared rich enough to provide one for her. One daughter had been the result of their union; and it was on that young lady's account, as she was now eighteen, that Mrs. Earnshaw decided, as she herself expressed it, to get the young people of the neighbourhood about her.

Mr. Earnshaw was a tyrant at home, and short as had been as yet his residence at Park-

field, he had contrived to show a spirit of litigation and a desire of interference in parochial and district matters, which had given considerable umbrage to many of the gentlemen resident in the neighbourhood.

It had been noticed with some surprise, that on the day after the arrival of the family at Parkfield, Mr. Earnshaw had called at Combe Hatton Rectory, and that, contrary to established usages—for Mr. Santland was known to set his face resolutely against all morning visits—the ex-attorney was not only admitted to the Rector's sanctum, but remained for considerably more than an hour in conversation with its inmate.

"And master he did be looking very pale after Mr. Earnshaw took himself off," said Jane, when she afterwards reported the visit to Mrs. Fendall. "He did look mortal pale, surely; and 'Jane,' says he, 'get me a glass of wine.' You know, m'm, it isn't but very seldom master takes a glass of wine before six o'clock. And then he drinks it off, and says to me, more himself like, 'Jane,' says he, 'what do you think of that gentleman?' And I laughs, for I wanted to make him smile, and says I, 'It don't strike me, sir, as he's a gentleman at all.'

And at that master gave a little laugh, and then he sighed, m'm—such a weary sigh—it went to my heart like to hear him; and he walked away for better than two hours under the elm trees, up and down, up and down. Ah, ma'am, master's a got something on his mind; sure as I've lived with him forty years come next Whitsuntide, he's a got something on his mind."

It was about three weeks after Jane's lamentation over the unsatisfactory state of her master's spirits, that the latter, on one rainy October afternoon, walked unannounced (as was his custom) into Mrs. Fendall's cosy sitting-room, and sat down beside her on the sofa, which had been wheeled—for the weather was chilly—close to the bright wood fire.

He was not looking well, and Bessie would have liked to ask what ailed him. That would have been, however, among the evidences of feminine curiosity, as he called them, which the Rector never encouraged; so she abstained from the affectionate inquiry, and waited patiently till he should tell her the object of his visit.

"Bessie," he said, at length; his thin hands

were stretched towards the blaze, and he seemed desirous—at least so Mrs. Fendall thought—to hide his countenance from observation. “Bessie, I have come to talk with you on an unworthy subject. I am sure you will think the subject very unworthy; but I wish to speak to you about Mr Earnshaw. He does not often call here? Sir Matthew does not like him, I am sure?”

“Not at all. My father-in-law considers him, as indeed we all do, a vulgar, pushing man.”

“Good. And now, dear Bessie;—but tell me first, my dear, if you are better; no palpitations of the heart to-day, I trust? For—for you have a gloomy and a sinful tale to listen to; one which ——”

“Oh, Guardie, must I listen to it?” exclaimed poor Bessie, with the instinctive shrinking from emotion well understood by those whose nerves are weak and spirits flagging.

He did not listen to her, but began his dreary history at once.

He went back years and years of time, even to the days when the flame of youthful passion burned up hot and impressible within him,

and when— Ah! the punishment had been a life-long one!—when, forgetting honour, principle, and God, he had set at defiance the laws which He had framed, and had well-nigh brought public scandal on the profession he had chosen.

It was, indeed, a shameful and a guilty story—shameful for her to listen to, but more shameful still for him to tell.

He recounted to the trembling, agitated woman how deeply he had loved and how cruelly he had been deceived in one whom he was forbidden by the laws of God and man to call his own. He told her of a husband of low and grovelling mind—a pettifogging, scheming lawyer, who accepted money as the price of his wife's guilt, and who for forty years had held him in such thralldom, that his life had often been to him but little better than a burthen.

He poured into that loving, faithful breast, his every sorrow—he hid nothing from her; and when, at last, the mists of evening shrouded them in coming darkness, and only a faint flicker from the expiring fire showed to each other thin, pale, and grief-worn faces, then Bessie sunk before him on the floor, and

resting her weeping face upon the Rector's knees, cried—

“Father! I should have known it. Father, I never guessed the truth! Forgive me now; and, if you love me, call me ‘child’ once more!”

CHAPTER XXII.

MYLES AT WORK.

THE inhabitants of Hillingstone and of the surrounding country were anything but satisfied with the chance which had caused the rejoicings for the Colonel's return to fall in the gloomy month of December. It was such a mistake—they did not say whose—to suppose that anything could be done at that period of the year. If it were summer, now, they might have a most delicious *fête* at Hazel Combe!—triumphal arches, and a *déjeuner*, with bows and arrows, and becoming costumes! How delightful it would be! Whereas, what would it all end in now?—just a common ball, and nothing more! In short, all things having been duly considered, a majority of young ladies were decidedly in favour of petitioning good old Sir Matthew to put off the gala till a more propitious season of the year should again come round.

“What nonsense those Crutchley and De

Berny girls do talk about putting off this stupid affair!" said Myles one day to his cousin Rosamond, with whom he was very affectionate and confidential—when Rica was not present to take umbrage at his civilities.

"I think so too," said the straightforward girl, to whom it never occurred that her cousin, or any one else, could say one thing and mean another. "But why do you call it stupid? I am so sorry—I fancied you wished for it, and after all the difficulties have been smoothed——"

"Thanks to you, dear Rosa."

"Well, then, thanks to me—I won't disclaim the credit of gaining dear grandpapa's consent—but it was not quite without trouble; and it does seem a little provoking now to hear you talk as if you did not care about it."

"Well, but—I do care—only it's always rather a bore to be made a fuss about; and I hate making a speech, and talking about brave companions in arms, and telling all the country bumpkins that I did no more than other people, and all that kind of humbug. Besides, it's such a nuisance its being December."

"A yearly nuisance!" laughed Rosamond; "but we can't help that!"

"True—but it is such a pity that Hazel

Combe should not be looking at its best, with the trees in leaf, and the sun shining on the ponds——”

“*Lakes*, please,” put in Rosamond, who was very proud of the few dozen acres of water, fringed by the beech and hazel woods, to which Myles had, in her opinion, given a name so inappropriate.

“Well, then, lakes,” he said, with a smile. “But, Rosamond, how fond you are of *Hazel Combe*! You would not give it up, I suppose, for the world?”

“Give it up!” she exclaimed.

“Oh! I did not mean exactly give it up, but it would break your heart, of course, if it went to any one else?—to *Rica*, for instance.”

“Well, I certainly should be sorry,” answered Rosamond, frankly. “But we ought not to talk in this way of it *Myles*, for it can be no one’s but dear grandpapa’s till after his death; and I am sure we all hope that that sad event may not happen for many a year to come.”

“Many years cannot be reckoned on, I fear, after seventy-eight,” said Myles, with a very proper face of grief while uttering this melancholy truism; “and in the meantime, dear *Rosa*, does it not sometimes strike you as a little

hard that Rica—the child of Sir Matthew's elder son (I do not speak of myself," he added, with a bitter smile, "for *my* heritage is no secret)—but does it not seem hard lines that Rica should be so entirely cut out of all interest in Hazel Combe? Of course, it can make no difference to me, only, as an affair of common justice——"

"I don't believe that dear grandpapa could be unjust," said Rosamond, in a low voice; "and I have heard that there are reasons—reasons which I feel I had better not inquire into—which have induced him to make, what I fear you consider, an unjust will. Besides," she added, in a more cheerful tone, "I confess that I do dearly love my beautiful Hazel Combe! Look, Myles! Is not this view exquisite? Come near the edge, and look straight down the Combe."

It was, indeed, a lovely scene, although the month *was* December, and though the winter wind was blowing the last brown leaves in showers from the aged oaks.

Below them, at a depth of some sixty feet—it was not more, for the features of the scenery did not come under the head of "grand,"—there ran a rivulet, swollen by the recent rains, and rushing noisily over its rocky bottom. The dwarf

beeches and the hazels grew thickly on the banks, mingled with the glistening foliage of the holly, and the more sombre tints of the widely-spreading junipers.

They stood together on the verge of that steep declivity, and Myles, whose natural taste for the picturesque was limited, and had been but little improved by cultivation, turned from the sight of trees and water to gaze with a certain undefined expression of countenance (in which, however, admiration had no inconsiderable share) on Rosamond's blooming face.

"Is it not beautiful?" she said again—fixing her dark blue eyes till the tears gathered in them, on the swiftly-flowing river, and the shining rocks below. "And I have loved this dear place from my infancy!—loved every tree and shrub, and nook and hollow! While Rica—Myles, do you think me very selfish?—very forgetful of your sister's interests? You should not—for Frederica is scarcely more your sister than she is mine; and her home will be at Hazel Combe, and—— Ah! well; it is not right or feeling, perhaps, to speak of plans dependent on another's life, and my grandfather might not like that I should reveal the secrets of his will."

"You saw it, then? Excuse my asking you,

but I must be naturally anxious for my sister."

"I saw it? Yes; and Rica is well remembered in my grandfather's last testament."

"Just a few thousands, probably," remarked Colonel Fendall, with a carelessness which he was far from feeling.

"*Many*," said Rosamond, in a low tone—for her conscience half-whispered to her that she had no right to say the words—"many; and you the same, dear Myles; for £15,000 will be my cousin Rica's portion."

He looked again into her clear eyes, and the same undefinable expression, but deeper in its intensity, which had again been gradually stealing over his features, settled—when Rosamond had named the "paltry" sum—into a fixed and almost threatening gaze—a gaze which might possibly have alarmed his cousin had she chanced at that moment to turn her eyes in the direction where he stood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MYLES RECEIVES A COMPLIMENT.

THE programme of the Hazel Combe *fête* was arranged, after much consideration, in the following fashion. In the first place, it was to take place on the rent-day—always an important occasion at the Combe; and it was to combine amusement for those of low degree with as much entertainment as the lateness of the season admitted of for those who were more fastidious in their notions of pleasure.

“Nothing in the world ever was so mismanaged,” complained Rica, in her rather high-pitched, petulant tones. “You see, Hortense, that it ought all to have been arranged before dear Myles came home; and then the triumphal arches would have been ready. Of course it is too late now! So provoking!”

“Very provoking, and certainly too late,” laughed Hortense, “for it would be rather absurd to put an arch across the road *now*, when

Colonel Fendall has been walking along the avenue twelve times a day for the fortnight past."

"I am sure it will be all that is most nice," cried little Laura, who was busy cutting out paper roses and laughing rather noisily with Colonel Fendall, who, as usual, was making himself agreeable to his cousins by the repetition of many a piquante anecdote, told with spirit, and enlivened with well-levelled strokes of sarcasm. "I am sure that we shall enjoy ourselves well. I long to see those great, fat farmers dine. And, Colonel Myles, you will have to what they call speak. Shall you show much eloquence, do you believe?"

"It depends on whether I shall have to return thanks for the ladies," answered Myles, gallantly.

"Thanks for the ladies? What do you mean to say? Who gave the ladies to you to thank for?"

There was a general laugh at Laura's mistake, in which the light-hearted girl joined merrily; and then Hortense, putting the question generally, inquired whether any one knew why their cousins Crutchley were not assisting in the momentous work of decorating Hazel Combe for Colonel Fendall's *fête*.

At first, no one seemed inclined to answer, but Rica, who was rarely backward when a reason was to be given, began at length muttering an excuse about too many hands spoiling the work.

“Especially when they are Crutchley hands,” said Myles. “Hortense, Laura—you who are accustomed to numeros 5 and 6 of Joivin’s best—what think you, let me ask, of the fists of *les demoiselles* Crutchley?”

They all laughed, excepting Rosamond, who, feeling more responsible for the absence of her cousins, threw out a hint about Janetta and Fanny never seeming to enjoy themselves at Hazel Combe—she did not know why it was, but they never had seemed to enter into any of the Hazel Combe jokes; and as for Maud, the youngest, she was the most incomprehensible girl!—always seemed to be thinking of something else. She did not understand it, but Maud certainly did seem to be rather eccentric.

“And then they *bande* their hair with lenitive electuary, and use oils and unguents of a suspicious quality,” said Myles. “No, my dear Rosa, believe me that we are, on the whole, just as well without the Crutchleys. They are very good girls, I dare say, but the—

'Surgery still peeps out in all they utter,
And senna smells still worse than bread and butter.'

There was another laugh (they could not help it, Colonel Fendall spoke so funnily) from all but Hortense, who said, gravely—

"I don't see anything so very ridiculous about the Crutchleys, they are always happy-looking and ready to be amused; while, as for Cousin Janetta herself——"

"Oh, Cousin Janetta has proved herself, I grant you, to be a thoroughly sensible woman. As there was nothing to be done in what Mrs. Earnshaw would call the high-up line, she has taken to be jolly with all her might. A good three-bottle woman is Cousin Janetta, I have no doubt—I never saw her in her cups."

"Tea-cups," amended Rosamond, who felt rather guilty in allowing their relations to be so mercilessly treated; "and really, Myles, as for the poor girls——"

"Poor! Ah, that is it. The Crutchleys are exactly the sort of girls who are always called poor."

"But I don't see why," said Hortense. "Janetta is the only one that you can call plain; and Fanny has always plenty to say."

"Granted, and, therefore, Janet should be

never seen, and Miss Fanny seldom heard. A little goes a great way in Fan Crutchley's conversation."

"But, then, Maud does play beautifully," pleaded Rosamond, who was unwilling to abandon her cousins' cause.

"Playing to which nobody listens," sneered Myles. "If Maud sung as well as she performs on that much-hammered instrument at Apothecaries' Hall, it would be more to the purpose. Fine playing always seems to me to be (like virtue) its own reward. And now that we have polished off *les demoiselles* Crutchley, suppose we take a turn at the hollyhocks. Upon my word, Laura, your pretty little Parisian fingers have made a beauty where it was not before," he added, taking up a large orange-coloured flower, which Laura assured him would be a delicate straw-colour by candlelight.

"*N'est ce pas que c'est un succès—un véritable succès,*" said Laura, blushing and smiling; for she had been quite ready from the first to be delighted with the agreeable Colonel, whose French was so perfect, and who talked *toilette à ravir*.

The truth was that Mademoiselle Laura de Berny was the least in the world of a coquette,

and inclined to see an admirer in every one of the opposite sex who whispered compliments in her pretty little ear. Hortense used to say, however, that there was safety in the multitude of Laura's lovers. She was of a more reflecting turn of mind than Laura, and had her feelings under better control.

"I could understand, perhaps, your being in love, my dear Laura," she would remark, "*si je ne voyez pas de près ces messieurs—mais—*"

And then Laura would stop her wise sister (who doated on her) with an energetic kiss, and make promises of amendment which were forgotten almost as soon as uttered.

The rejoicings at Hazel Combe were, according to the latest arrangements, to last two days, and were to be inaugurated by a tenantry dinner, given in the great banquetting-room at the Hall. The children also on the estate were to be regaled on the occasion with unwonted luxuries, and such sports as the season admitted of were to be indulged in by the juvenile male portion of the community.

The weather was mild and genial—no fogs or rain, and every one trooped to the Combe with the intention of making the most of their "betters'" permission to enjoy themselves.

A prosperous-looking company of British yeomen were the fifty-two well-to-do land occupiers, who, after emptying their purses into the lap of luxury—*id est*, the ready hands of Sir Matthew's steward—sat down to enjoy at two long separate tables the good things which had been prepared for them. There was roast beef and boiled, turkeys unnumbered, and the county pudding in the highest state of perfection; and nothing could have gone off better than the whole affair. The guests ate with thorough English appetite, and drank with thorough English zest. They were properly quiet and respectful during the repast, and not *improperly* uproarious when toasts were drank and the strong ale had done its work. One mistake certainly had been made, but that was by a *yokel* who knew no better, and who, under the influence of beer, and a wish to say the civil thing, persisted in cheering Colonel Myles as the future baronet. It was done, and, after all, as the Colonel thought, it did not much signify; for—who could tell?—perhaps it would give the “old governor” a hint of what he ought to do; and present mortification might end in future benefit to the ill-used grandson, whose future interests so loudly demanded his own watchful supervision.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MYLES HAS HIS WITS ABOUT HIM.

ONE of the most fortunate circumstances attending the ball at Hazel Combe was the unavoidable absence of Mr. Earnshaw.

He was very sorry—he called the day before to say so—but business, unavoidable business, connected with a rather considerable and unexpected addition to his fortune, obliged him to pay a visit to London.

“I have but one child, Sir Matthew,” the jolly man said; “but one’s child is one’s child; and what’s bred in the bone, you know—Ha! ha! ha! And if I can give her a few pounds by-and-by, why—stranger things have happened.” And he made a sort of half “dig” at the old gentleman’s ribs, which the latter warded off dexterously enough—considering his time of life—with an ivory paper-cutter, which he happened to hold in his hand.

“Can I do anything for you, Miss Rosa-

mond?" he asked, turning to the young lady, who considered his presuming to mention her Christian name at all as one among his many acts of impertinence,—“can I do anything for you in town? If you are at all like my girl, you will have a commission or two to give me. Never mind employing Jack Earnshaw. I'm an old married man, Miss Rosamond—no consequences, you know; and I don't ask anything for my trouble, as a young fellow—Colonel Myles for instance—might do.”

Rosamond thanked him rather stiffly; she was much obliged, but she wanted nothing in London.

“Nor mamma either?” asked the insupportably familiar Jack. “Come, now, suppose you ask her; you just say that Jack Earnshaw wishes to know whether he can make himself generally useful. It's very odd, Miss Rosamond, but it's a fact, that I've never set eyes on your mamma since I've been in the country, and that's six weeks come next Thursday. I suppose Mrs. Fendall *shows* sometimes, though, like other people, eh?”

“Mamma is a great invalid,” began Rosamond, distantly.

“Oh, yes; we all know what that means—

idleness, fine ladyism, and all that sort of thing ; been too long without a husband,—wants one to brush her up—eh, Sir Matthew ? ”

Fortunately for the dignified old gentleman addressed in this familiar fashion, his habitually slight deafness was increased by a cold in the head, caught at the previous day’s rejoicings, so that Mr. Earnshaw’s facetious remarks fell unheeded on his ear.

Rosamond was too indignant to do more than bow a slight and very cold acknowledgment ; and Mr. Earnshaw, finding that he had little chance on that occasion of obtaining a sight of the widow, soon after took his leave.

It had been a work of some difficulty to persuade Mrs. Fendall that she would either give or receive pleasure by being present in the forthcoming scene of gaiety.

“ It is very good of you, darling, to wish it,” she said ; “ but I shall be quite out of my element in a ball-room. I never was but at one dance in my life, dear, and that was many years ago, when I was scarcely older than you are now.”

“ Was dear papa there ? ” asked Rosamond in a low tone, and encouraged to ask questions by a gentle sigh, that seemed to ask for sympathy.

"Yes, dear; he had just returned to England after several years of absence; and—Rosamond, my child, I often long to talk to you of my earlier days, to warn you of some rocks on which my happiness—it was very short, dear—was once nearly shipwrecked; but when I seem to feel the strength to speak, then it all deserts me hopelessly, and my heart beats so, Rosy dear, that I am forced to shut myself up once more in silence, and what seems like gloom."

"You are never gloomy, mother dear," said Rosamond, fondly, "never to me, at least; and I still think that if you would only try—just for a short half hour only—you should be very quiet, and you would see the pretty dresses, and it might cheer and do you good."

"What does the Rector say?" asked Mrs. Fendall, smiling faintly at her daughter's remedy for chronic depression such as hers.

"He says that if you would be an hour among the company, he would be the same. He thinks Sir Matthew wishes it—would consider it a compliment to Myles, perhaps—and, mother darling, you should not be agitated for one single moment. But I do so long to see you looking like yourself, and beautiful again, in your black velvet dress and Brussels lace. You won't

refuse me, will you?" And Rosamond begged so earnestly, that it would have required a harder heart, and a far more selfish disposition than Bessie's, to turn a deaf ear to an entreaty so eager and so affectionate.

The guests arrived, smiled agreeably on the pale-faced hostess, and never thought to ask the reason of her colourless cheeks and trembling lips. They had not come there, so many miles, to look at *her*! They had come for amusement, for dancing, for flirtation, for scandal—who can say for what? But certainly it was not to make inquiries worthy of a sick-room, or of Dr. Thomas Crutchley—who, by the way, was there—full-blown, large as life—for he had grown very stout, and who was far enough from carrying a sick-room atmosphere about with him.

For many a mile away the country families had arrived to do honour to Sir Matthew and to the "hero"—that was the word—who had fought (it was a pity, some young ladies thought, that he had not bled, too) for his country: and Colonel Myles, as almost every one agreed, bore his honours very well, and, if not exactly *meekly*, still with a sort of protesting satisfaction, which spoke highly for his natural tact.

Dancing was carried on that evening with wonderful spirit, and more than once Sir Matthew was induced, by his attentive granddaughter Frederica, to desert his quiet corner in the card-room, and show his powdered head in the doorway of the grand saloon.

"It is very pretty, my dear," he remarked on one of these occasions, "and they go round very fast; but I think that your Aunt Bessie must be growing tired. We must not let her suffer for her kindness. Where is Rosamond? I think that I should like to caution her."

"Oh, Rosamond is everywhere, and nowhere, grandpapa," said Rica. "She has danced every single dance, I do believe, and I should be an hour finding her; but I will go to dear Aunt Bessie—I will not let her tire herself." And Rica hurried away with a zeal which could not fail to impress Sir Matthew with a very favourable opinion both of her head and heart.

She passed the smaller library, where the tea and ices were being handed to the guests by chamber-maidens decked with the almost-forgotten colours of the Hazel Combe Hunt, and from thence, two steps brought her to a small apartment but little used by the family, and the

existence of which was almost unknown to the majority of the assembled company.

Rica thought it highly probable that in that retired and comparatively quiet room she would find Aunt Bessie—Aunt Bessie, who had been, as Frederica well knew, anything but neglected, for her own astonishment had been more than once elicited by the sight of Rosamond abandoning ball-room and partners, lights and music, to inquire after her mother's comfort, and say the few encouraging words which the nervous invalid was so certain to appreciate.

Frederica had no idea of emulating a self-denial so little in accordance with her habits. She was enjoying the ball immensely ; not that she had many partners—far from it—but she had from the very beginning of the evening been indulging in what was, to her, the greatest of known pleasures—namely, that of almost entirely engrossing the attention of her half-brother, and thus filling the minds of those young ladies who had been rash enough to aspire to the honour of his notice with feelings of unmixed envy and mortification.

“Did you ever see so devoted a brother as Colonel Fendall?” “Were there ever such attentions seen?” “He knows she will not dance

much—who would ask her? she is so very plain and under-sized. And so most good-naturedly (for Colonel Fendall *is* so nice) he devotes himself to her, lest she should feel—poor little thing—that she's neglected! How very kind—really quite chivalrous! One so seldom sees that kind of thing, you know, in these days."

These were a few among the many remarks made that night on Myles Fendall's devotion to the little half-sister, whose almost idolatry of himself could not fail to touch even a colder heart than his. It was, indeed, no sacrifice to him to be ever at hand to give her pleasure—to amuse her by his lively sarcasms, and to choose for her especial delectation such choice crumbs of scandal as had chanced to fall within his reach. For he was very fond indeed, as I have said, of Rica—between whom and himself there existed the community and bond of the world's supposed ill usages.

There was no spoken compact between the two, that the wits which had been given them should be set to work in order that the Hazel Combe riches should be turned into the rightful channel. They had formed no plan together to upset the influence of the younger branch, and

yet each knew, as well as if their projects had been the frequent themes of lengthened conversations, that one intention—one end to be attained, guided their every action, and that that end was, justice to Colonel Matthew's children, and the downfall of Rosamond's hopes as heiress to Hazel Combe!

CHAPTER XXV.

BESSIE FALLS INTO A TRAP.

RICA had scarcely crossed the threshold of the somewhat dimly-lighted room, when she heard her brother's voice.

"Hush!" he whispered, mysteriously, after emerging from she scarcely knew where. "Hush!—Earnshaw has been here for ten minutes or more. I want to see the meeting. He is in the supper-room. Make Mrs. Fendall come—I will keep a place for her near me. Be quick: he will be close behind us. Now, Rica, see what your cunning little head can do. I shall be watching—only, all depends on speed."

He was gone before Rica could reply, and she, in another moment, was leaning over the elbow-chair in which her aunt was resting.

"I think that I must go to bed, darling," said the latter, in a tired voice; and then, perceiving that it was not Rosamond who had come to seek

her, her countenance changed, and her manner grew more reserved.

"I should be sorry to do anything uncivil, my dear," she said, with her usual unselfish kindness; "but I hardly think I should be missed—you and Rosa do the honours so well. I would not disturb her while she is dancing, poor dear child! and if you would give me your arm, dear Rica, I think that I could go upstairs—through the small library, you know; and then grandpapa and Mr. Santland will not think that I was over-tired."

"Mr. Santland is gone, I think," said Rica; "but the little library is crowded still with tea-drinkers, so that through the supper-room would be the safest way, and you need not stay a moment, dear Aunt Bessie—just to see how beautiful it looks!" And she laid her little hand—that *griffe de chatte*, as Hortense once described it—*si bien gantée de velours*—on Mrs. Fendall's arm, persuasively.

The latter rose slowly from her chair. She looked very weary by the gleam of the two wax candles, which alone gave light to the small but lofty apartment; and Rica, who was not really destitute of feeling, although every other instinct was deadened by her absorbing affection for

Myles, felt some prickings of self-reproach as Aunt Bessie languidly prepared to follow her advice.

The poor woman was quite misled regarding the scene she was about to witness. She had no idea—nor could she have, from the words which had escaped her niece—that the supper-room was already crowded with hungry, talking, laughing people, and that through their ranks she must run the gauntlet before she could gain the privacy and comparative quiet of her own apartments.

Rica felt the weak hand tremble on her arm, as Mrs. Fendall first became aware of the trap into which she had fallen.

“I am so sorry—so distressed, Aunt Bessie,” she whispered. “All these people have come whilst I was looking for you; but it will not last a moment. We will skirt along the wall—behind Myles, there. Don’t you see? Myles will make a way for us, and we shall soon be past the crowd.”

A very ghost-like face was poor Aunt Bessie’s as she tremblingly followed the advice of her active-minded niece. Early in the evening there had been a feverish flush upon her cheeks, which had lent lustre to her dark eyes,

and caused many present, who had known her in her days of beauty, to compliment Sir Matthew on his daughter-in-law's appearance.

"Delighted to see Mrs. Fendall looking so well." "Not aged a day." "Handsomest almost than her daughter." These were a few of the flattering speeches which greeted the ears of the affectionate old man. But well as Bessie's appearance had at first justified these flattering encomiums, her hour of triumph was completely over now, and, but for Myles, the ghastly gliding figure, clad in its long pall-like robe of velvet, would have passed unheeded through that self-engrossed and noisy crowd.

She and her conductress had arrived, with some little elbowing and pushing on the part of the latter, at the place where Colonel Fendall was engaged in attending to the requirements of some ladies near him, when a stout, elderly, and very red-faced man touched the "hero" of the evening with his elbow.

"Oh!—ah!—yes! I beg your pardon," said Myles, looking round, as if in surprise at the interruption. "I beg your pardon—I quite forgot. Mrs. Fendall, let me introduce you to Mr. Earnshaw. Mr. Earnshaw—Mrs. Fendall." And, apparently satisfied that he had done his

duty, he returned to the arduous task of supplying dancing young ladies with chickens' wings, hot-house fruit, and champagne *ad libitum*.

"Very glad to see you, Mrs. Fendall—thought I was never to have the honour of making your acquaintance." Mr. Earnshaw was beginning in what seemed more than his usual tone of offensive familiarity, when even he—coarse brute although he was—felt touched, for one passing moment, by the expression of agony which distorted the startled woman's features. Her face could scarcely grow more wan and white, but her eyelids opened wildly, and then closed with a kind of convulsive movement; and the handkerchief which she pressed closely against her quivering lips was tinged with a crimson hue.

Rica—to do her justice—was greatly distressed by the result of her brother's experiment. She had believed it very possible that Mrs. Fendall might, on being confronted with Earnshaw, betray some convicting symptoms of emotion, but for such a painful evidence of suffering neither she nor Myles were in any degree prepared.

"Come away, Aunt Bessie. Myles, give her

your arm. Aunt Bessie—dear Aunt Bessie,” she continued, as Mrs. Fendall, moved by the never-failing instinct which warned her that any expression of feeling might be injurious to those she loved, continued her painful efforts at composure.

Myles looked towards his aunt at the sound of Rica’s impressive whisper, and he, too, was shocked by the spectacle of her extreme distress. After all, Aunt Bessie had been ever kind to *them*—constant and unvarying in her affectionate and friendly offices, and perhaps they had gone too far in subjecting her to an ordeal so severe; so, moved by a tardy sensation of remorse, Myles took Mrs. Fendall kindly by the hand, and as he led her gently from the presence of that unsympathising crowd, he whispered soothing words to her—said he would look for Rosamond—and, wishing her an affectionate “good night,” bade her sleep well and soundly.

Half-an-hour elapsed, and still the laugh and merry jest went round, while Rosamond, in her mother’s far-off room, waited till the patient woman slept the unrefreshing sleep of weariness and exhaustion.

The sounds could still be heard at intervals, as some burst of merriment louder than the rest

rang through the echoing passages ; and it was after one of these that Dr. Crutchley—who was a man of authority in his line—made his voice heard above the din which high spirits and champagne had given birth to in that genteel assemblage.

There had been a question, just before, of a flirtation between Janetta Crutchley, who was not present, and an evangelical young curate, who was too “serious” to dance.

“Thinks it better to be wise than merry,” Mr. Santland had said, when he had heard of his curate’s views ; but he knew the young man to be right-minded and conscientious, and respected him accordingly.

“They cannot marry ; he has nothing but his curate’s pay—a hundred a-year—*pour toutes ressources*,” said Hortense, who professed to know all about it.

“Never mind—I’ll wager that it will be a match,” said Myles. “Ugly women stoop to folly as well as lovely ones, and we shall see Janetta hemming the curate’s surplices before another year is out.”

It was at this identical moment that Dr. Crutchley’s voice was heard.

“I say, young people,” he called out, “do

you know the time? Two o'clock, and the house ought to have been quiet an hour ago. Miss Laura, suppose you finish up that little flirtation with Captain Oxenham to-morrow; and Fendall, you can stick that chesnut mare of yours into unsuspecting Mr. Grosvenor at any time. Miss Rica, as your medical man, I would advise a little less of that rich cream—sits heavy on the stomach late at night, and next day you will be coming to me for something warm and comfortable to put you to rights again."

Colonell Fendall was very much inclined to resent the doctor's interference, for the latter's "vulgar familiarity" in addressing him as "Fendall" was, in his opinion, a heavy tax to pay for the honour of relationship with Sir Matthew; and then his attack upon Rica—his impertinence in interfering with the arrangements of *his* guests! Altogether the doctor clearly deserved to be set down; but then Myles knew by experience that Tom Crutchley was not exactly—country doctor though he was—a man with whom he might venture to trifle; and, moreover, the said Tom stood high in favour with Sir Matthew; so, all things considered, he deemed it safer to curb his indignation, and, making a merit of necessity, to assist

the doctor in his endeavours to restore the Combe to something of its wonted quiet.

In another hour the last guest had departed, and only Rosamond, lingering by her mother's side, remained awake to think over the expired glories of her cousin Myles' ovation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

FOR some months it had been Mrs. Fendall's habit to remain in her own apartments throughout the greater portion of the forenoon. It was, therefore, a subject for some surprise to the household when Rosamond informed Sir Matthew at luncheon-time that her mother had gone to Hillingstone and Combe Hatton. She believed, she said, that the Rector had expressed a wish to see her. She did not exactly know ; her mother had merely told her that she should probably not return till late in the afternoon.

Rica and her brother glanced quickly at one another on hearing this intelligence ; but it was only Sir Matthew who appeared anxious to obtain further information.

"I hope your mother took the brougham, my dear," he said ; "the wind is sharp this morning—from the east, I fancy—and she may be poorly after yesterday's fatigue."

Rosamond looked considerably embarrassed while her grandfather was speaking. She was little used to concealments and mystery, and something warned her that she was being the object of a not over-friendly scrutiny. Why her cousins should have looked from one to the other with such meaning glances she did not attempt to understand, but that they had done so was certain; and she set herself, therefore, the more strenuously to work to obey the injunctions given her by her mother at the moment of her departure.

“Make as light of my absence as you can, dear Rosa,” she had said, “and endeavour to avoid the necessity of answering questions. I shall return as speedily as possible. Nay, dearest, do not be uneasy; I am stronger—better far to-day than I have been for months. The Rector has a little private business for me to transact this morning, and it is possible that we may go on to Hillingstone together. So, good-bye, my Rosamond; and be sure you do not betray any symptoms either of surprise or anxiety on my account.”

The brougham, as Mrs. Fendall had informed her daughter would be the case, had conveyed the suffering woman to Combe Hatton Rectory,

where Mr. Santland, far from expecting her, was on the point of sending off a messenger to the Combe to inquire after her health.

She leant her head wearily back as the short distance was traversed, and longed eagerly and half-repiningly for some of the lost strength of nerves and spirits which would have enabled her in former days to bear her part courageously in the struggle which she saw was coming.

She held a folded letter in her hand, and more than once she opened it to read and read again the few short lines which it contained.

“DEAR MADAM” (these were the words which Mrs. Fendall glanced over),—“Dear Madam,—I beg to apologise for my apparent importunity, but, being a family man, I consider myself justified in calling your attention to a certain money transaction, which has for several years remained in a most unsatisfactory state, between Mr. Santland and me. Nothing can be further from my wish than to rake up old and unpleasant stories, but unless some measures of a decided nature are immediately taken, I shall conceive it a duty which I owe to myself and family to make this matter the subject for legal investigation. Waiting your reply, and con-

cluding that you are aware of the obligations to me under which Mr. Santland lies, I have the honour to remain,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ JOHN EARNSHAW.”

“ Obligations to him !” murmured poor Bessie, with a degree of bitterness which made her consider her own heart to be indeed desperately wicked,—“ obligations to him !—to the man who accepted payment for his wife’s disgrace, and for his own irremediable dishonour ! And my guardian !—my poor, poor father ! To think that for nearly forty years he has kept this cruel secret gnawing at his heart, when by a word to me (to his daughter, who loved him ever with a child’s deep love, though ignorant of the tie which bound him to me) he might have comforted his sad heart, and ceased to be a broken-spirited and a brooding man ! ”

The carriage stopped before the Rectory gate as Bessie arrived at this point in her reflections, and, pulling the check-string, she desired the servant not to ring, for that she would walk through the garden to the house.

A very different aspect did that ordinarily well-kept *plesauce* bear to the trim *parterres*

and closely-shaven lawn which, but a few short weeks ago, had been its characteristics. There were more weeds than flowers in it now—"last roses of summer" hanging drooping on their stalks, and faded violets, enough to supply a hecatomb of sonnets of the most orthodox and melancholy description. Even on the gravel walks the intruding grass was growing, and along them walked the once-careful owner of the neglected place, with stooping head, and hands clasped in moody fashion behind his back.

He looked up as Bessie approached him, and for a moment his memory flashed back many a year—even to the bright summer day when she, a joyous, thoughtless child, tired of the simple daisies of the field, begged him to give her larger blossoms to weave into a grander "chain."

There were no "chains" of flowers for that worn-out woman now, but only the lengthened heavy one she dragged along, and which he would gladly bear the burthen of, and save her from its crushing weight.

A visit from Mrs. Fendall at that early period of the day could not fail to strike the Rector with alarm. It was so long, too, since she had been to see him at Combe Hatton; for it had grown into a habit that he should be the one to

seek her in the quiet pretty rooms in the west wing of the Combe, where by far the greater portion of Mrs. Fendall's time was passed. He advanced to meet her quickly, for he was very anxious, and, placing her arm within his, drew her gently towards the house.

She did not speak till the door of the study had closed upon them, and then she said, gaspingly—

“Guardie, I have seen him! He was there last night! Last night he spoke to me, and to-day I have this letter. Read it. God help us! for I know not what to do.”

Something terribly like a malediction—for he was sorely harrassed—rose to Santland's lips; nor were his uncharitable feelings towards the writer by any means increased by the perusal of the letter which Bessie put into his hands.

“There is nothing for it but to see him,” he said, after pausing for a few moments to think over the unpleasant necessity; “nothing! The fellow wishes to make his ten thousand pounds secure, and is afraid that without something binding is effected it will slip through his fingers.”

“Or that *I* shall,” said Bessie, with a mournful smile. “I suspect it was the sight

of my ghastly face last night which made him feel he had no time to lose."

I will not repeat the angry, violent words with which the Rector greeted this very probable suggestion. He accused the ex-attorney—and that with some show of justice—of every low and unworthy motive—of treachery, cowardice, and dishonesty.

"But, dear Guardie," began poor Mrs. Fendall, who foresaw many a future danger in this indulgence of ill-feeling,—“dear Guardie, the man may be poor, and he has a daughter. You see, he puts it upon duty."

"Duty! The consummate scoundrel! Bessie, my child," he added, with a grim smile, which pained Mrs. Fendall almost more than his angry words, so unnatural seemed a jest at such a moment,—“Bessie, it is not the first time that a man has made a confusion between principles and interest, and fortunate is he who can make them both agree. However, as this particular rascal does not seem inclined to give us ‘credit’ for either, the sooner we can convince him of our good faith the better."

Meanwhile—for Rosamond had set out with her grandfather on his usual afternoon walk—Rica and the Colonel were discussing the events

of the preceding evening over the remains of the Hazel Combe luncheon.

"I own I should like to know where Mrs. Fendall has gone to this morning," said Frederica, as she delicately picked a few of the finest grapes from a large bunch on the dish before her.

"Gone! Where should she be gone, but to the Rectory?"

"Yes; but that note which she received this morning—*that* was was not from Mr. Santland!"

"True; and I am inclined to think that the fellow who brought it was a Parkfield hanger-on. It is not a bad card though, I should imagine, to keep well with old Santland, who must have saved a pot of money all the years he has had that living—eight hundred a year, and he never can have spent three."

"I wonder what all the odd stories really are about him? Some people say he was married once, to some one beneath him."

"It would be difficult to find any one lower than old Santland, if one of the little anecdotes one hears of him is true. I suspect he is about as much a widower, indeed, as Lady B——, or my friend Mrs. C——, are really unprotected females. But what are you going to do to-day,

dear? Rosamond has got hold of the old gentleman, and I must ride to C—— about that mare."

"Will Mr. Grosvenor buy her, do you think?" asked Rica, who always entered warmly into her brother's plans.

"I should rather think so," he replied, with a knowing look. "But what do you say to riding with me? You can show the mare off beautifully, and we can have a delicious gallop over Witham Down."

His sister saw no reason for refusal, and in half an hour they were equipped for their expedition.

"Let us go first to Hillingstone," suggested Rica. "We can come back by the Downs, you know, and I want to buy some gloves at Willis'."

The brother and sister, still talking of family affairs, family mysteries, and of their own individual prospects, rode slowly through the still pleasant lanes which led to Hillingstone. They passed the row of alms-houses as they approached the town, and then on beyond the railway station, where the usual bustle gave token of the recent arrival of a train.

"There is old Westerham!" exclaimed Myles,

as he waved his hand to a well-wigged gentleman, whose head protruded from a station fly. "Just come back the day after the ball," he muttered, discontentedly; for he fancied he saw in Lord Westerham's absence a proof of studied neglect.

"He went about a tooth," said Rica. "Laura told me all about it."

"Treacherous girl!" laughed Myles. "Rica, I hope that if ever I should have to go to London about a tooth—I mean some years hence, of course—that you will remember Napoleon's advice, and keep my secret. Certainly, one's worst foes are those of our own household."

"And yet we are only told to forgive our enemies," suggested Rica, with a smile.

And very cheerful and contented did they both look when, stopping at Willis', the haberdasher's, door, Myles requested to have some riding-gloves brought out for Miss Fendall's inspection.

The shop was almost exactly opposite to Mr. Dwindle's, the solicitor—a very comfortable house, with dazzlingly white door-step, and a knocker resplendent as shining brass can be.

The door belonging to that knocker opened

just as Colonel Fendall gave his order, and, looking towards it, he saw emerging from the house Mrs. Fendall, walking very slowly, and leaning on the Rector's arm.

They took no notice of the equestrians, but pursued their way silently down the street, while Rica bared her pretty little hand, and Colonel Myles was laughing with a jolly-faced, noisy man who had just accosted him.

"Delightful ball last night, Miss Fendall! Taking a ride, I see, to get the roses back, eh? My Henny wanted me to take her a canter, too, but it couldn't be done. 'Business before pleasure, my dear,' I said. So here I have been half the morning settling a little matter with Dwindle. Necessary evils, these lawyers. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Earnshaw's loud laugh was still echoing in their ears when Myles and his sister left the town behind them, and rode slowly on towards Witham Down.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BESSIE'S LEGACY.

"I DON'T feel at all sure that I like Myles Fendall. I did at first, but that is past, for I am convinced that he is *méchant*."

"Everyone is *méchant*, I think," said Rosamond, sadly. "Everyone—and I am sure that I do—laughs when others are turned into ridicule; and I am certain, Hortense, that we have all grown more ill-natured since Colonel Fendall came."

"He is very fond of his sister," suggested Laura, who was always ready to take the part of an agreeable individual of the other sex.

"*Tais-toi*, little goose," said Hortense. "What is the merit to be fond of one's sister?"

"Mr. Santland says that there is always danger in an exaggerated good quality," said Rosamond.

"*Comment?*" exclaimed Laura; and then, without waiting for an explanation, it was—

"Sir Matthew seems very fond indeed of Colonel Myles."

"Yes, Colonel Myles amuses him," said Hortense. "Colonel Myles has the gift to make him suit himself to all people. Colonel Myles listens to Grandpapa Fendall's long stories about 'his day,' and then comes here and everywhere to laugh at the old man who is so kind to him and Rica."

"And I have seen them," exclaimed Rosamond (roused by the mention of her good old grandfather's wrongs), "glance at one another with disgusted, and almost angry looks, when he has coughed—the dear old man!—too long to please them. Rica is almost worse than he is. It is so unnatural for a woman not to be patient with old age and infirmity."

"Sir Matthew would be very much astonished if he knew the truth," said Hortense; "and no one could ever tell him. Old people's pleasures are so few, and he thinks his grandchildren so perfect: Frederica can make him laugh so easily, and I believe that she could persuade him to do anything she pleased."

"And so can Myles," said Rosamond. "I am certain that very soon grandpapa will let him keep the hounds, for he looks so pleased and

proud when he sees Colonel Fendall in his red coat ; and he seems lately to have forgotten all about mamma."

"And how do you think that dear Aunt Bessie is ? " asked Hortense, affectionately.

"Very ill, I fear," answered Rosamond, with difficulty keeping back the tears which had long been struggling to her eyelids ; "very ill, I fear, though she tries hard, poor darling, to keep the truth from me. Tom Crutchley, too, looks very grave, and——"

But she could say no more, for strong emotion mastered her ; whilst the tender-hearted girls, well aware that poor Aunt Bessie's case was hopeless, could think of no better remedy for their friend's comfort than to mingle their tears with hers.

The day following this conversation, which took place during a visit paid by the De Bernys to Hazel Combe, the grievous truth was imparted to Rosamond that the time of her mother's stay on earth was likely to be even shorter than she had feared.

The melancholy intelligence was told to her gently and affectionately, but still in a manner which left no hope of respite, by Dr. Crutchley himself.

"I have disobeyed your mother's injunctions, my dear," he said to the sobbing girl; "but I did so both for your sake and for hers. It is natural and right that Mrs. Fendall should have some last wishes to impart, some last advice to give to you, her only child. And I have known you since you were a little girl, Rosamond, so that I have no fear of your agitating your poor mother by any exaggerated display of feeling."

"I will try not," murmured Rosamond, in a choking voice.

"And you will succeed, if you bear in mind how *her* life has been passed in self-forgetfulness, and in care for others' comfort. Even now her thoughts and her regrets are almost all for you; and the best consolation you can give her is the sight of a face resigned and cheerful under every dispensation which Providence may see fit to deal."

He was a kind-hearted man, that clever, blunt, and rather unmannerly Tom Crutchley; and he knew well the best form in which advice at serious moments may be administered to women, so he spoke of self-abnegation, resignation, and of the Disposing Hand which governs all things here below, and from whose fiat there is no appeal.

When Rosamond next stood beside her mother's bedside, knowing, as well she did, that another day might see her motherless, a stranger could have seen no change upon her face ; but the eyes of her who had so long watched every turn of that beloved countenance were not to be so easily deceived, and Bessie knew, when Rosamond bent over her and kissed her silently, that the poor child knew the truth !

That day they talked together long and solemnly ; and Mrs. Fendall, thankful that the stain of concealment was at last removed, felt comforted by the privilege of pouring forth the last advice and warnings, the last behests and prayers, to her who would, as well she knew, treasure up with care and reverence each murmured word of hers.

The sad truth that his daughter-in-law's life hung as it were upon a thread was received with deep and unfeigned sorrow by Sir Matthew. For many years—ay, for almost all her life, Bessie Fendall had formed the chief joy and solace of his existence ; and with her presence in the house were connected all the placid cheerfulness of his home. True, that for some time past he had grown to be less dependent on her for companionship, and that his two lately-

arrived grandchildren had seemed, in some sort, to have usurped her place ; but the moment it became known that his dear Johnnie's patient widow was about to leave them for a happier home, Bessie's rights were all restored to her, and the old man, wandering lonely about his accustomed haunts, felt that he should miss her gentle presence every hour of the days which would remain to him.

For one short week more did Bessie linger amongst them, and during that time the Rector, grave and sad to outward appearance, but with a heart whose bitterness he alone could tell, visited her daily. Many and long were the conferences which they held together, conferences from which even Rosamond was excluded, so earnest were they, and so all-engrossing to the two whose close and tender ties, though hinted at by many, had never been acknowledged by themselves.

"I foresee many a trial for you, my poor Rosa," Mrs. Fendall said one morning to her child—it was the last before her death, and a secret voice had warned the sorrowing girl that her mother would not see another dawn. "I see many a shadow darkening over you. Would that I could perceive as plainly how you will support the strokes which threaten you."

"I shall think of you, my mother, and have courage."

"Courage, my child ! Ah ! that is what you want. Courage, and a harder, sterner heart. You have been loved too much, my dear one, not to miss me when I'm gone. And if, as I greatly fear, there are those who—but I am wrong to think so—wrong to leave this world with a suspicion lurking at my heart. I will see and talk to Rica and to Myles. They will not refuse a dying woman's prayer for one who has no brother, and who will soon be motherless."

On that very evening it had been Bessie's purpose to seek a last interview with Rosamond's cousins—to force them by her prayers to be her poor child's friends, and to bespeak their kindly offices for her orphan girl ; but when the evening came it was too late, for the feeble fluttering of poor Bessie's heart was stilled for ever, and her loving eyes could plead her darling's cause no longer.

On a dreary day at the end of that sunless November month, Johnnie Fendall's widow was laid beside her husband in the grave. There were many mourners at her funeral, the aged baronet walking at their head, and shedding scanty, hard-wrung tears, which fell unwiped

upon his wrinkled face. He seemed bewildered by the calamity which had befallen him, and looked from one to another of the melancholy *cortége* with eyes which seemed to question them concerning his great misery.

Rosamond walked in her deep mourning garments by the old man's side, calm and resigned to all appearance, save when at intervals her frame was shaken by the suffocating sob which threatened to break through all her efforts at self-control.

In the churchyard there was a great crowd. Men and women, with sorrow-stricken faces, who had come, not from curiosity, but with the wish to show respect to the memory of the good Christian and the ever-sympathising friend whom they had lost ; and when Mr. Santland—for he would permit no other clergyman to perform that duty—began to read over poor Bessie's remains the solemn service for the dead, a faint wail of grief rose up from the throng.

There was not one in that vast assembly whose heart was not touched with grief at sight of that aged mourner and that heart-stricken girl ; even Myles Fendall and his sister were moved almost to tears, for they, with all now present, could remember (as her dust mingled with the church-

yard clay) that only words of charity and goodwill had ever escaped the lips of good Aunt Bessie, and that in the performing of offices of kindness she had never been found wanting.

Gone for the moment were all the selfish projects for their own advantage, which had so long been nursed by those two scheming ones. *She* had been removed from amongst them—she whose excellence they had failed to recognise, and whose heart they had often wounded by ridicule and neglect; and now, softened and remorseful, a desire to repair and make amends for the evils they had done stole over them, and unbidden tears for the departed rose to Frederica's eyes.

So the good of Bessie Fendall's kind and tender nature lived after her, verifying the poet's words, that—

“ Angels have walk'd unknown on earth,
But when they flew, were recognized ! ”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A POSTHUMOUS LETTER.

AFTER the funeral Sir Matthew and the Hazel family removed for a time to Brighton. The change was effected through the influence of Dr. Crutchley, who took every responsibility upon himself, and would not hear of either the old man or Rosamond remaining amidst the scenes of their recent affliction.

Rosamond had made no opposition to the arrangement. All places seemed alike to her. She could but be wretched—could but be the most lonely and miserable of created beings; and it mattered little to her where her tears were shed, and what places were witnesses to her sorrow.

The first event which roused her from this almost morbid indulgence in her affliction was the receipt of a letter from Mr. Santland, enclosing a voluminous packet, which she perceived

at a glance, and with a beating heart, was in her mother's handwriting.

"I have complied," wrote the Rector, "with your poor mother's urgent request, and sent you the long letter written by her in sorrow and in pain, before she said her last farewell to hopes of life, and prepared to go down into silence. My dear, the contents of this letter will surprise and distress you. May be, too, they will cause you to shun one who sets great value on your affection, both for your mother's sake and for your own. Should this be so, the *tenth* wave—the heaviest, and I trust the last—will have spent its fury on my head: for the waters of affliction have long been gathering round me, and the 'end' cannot now be far away."

The remaining portion of the letter consisted of complaints and murmurs; complaints over his heavy and irreparable loss, and murmurs against the loneliness of his life.

These Rosamond passed over in silence, in such trembling haste was she to break the seal of the other and far longer letter. At first she did but skim over its contents, and it required a second and even a third perusal to enable her thoroughly to comprehend the full meaning of the words she read.

“My dearest Rosamond” (she saw the words with eyes nearly blinded by her tears)—“My dearest Rosamond, your heart will be very heavy when you open this letter, and I fear as you read on that the weight may only be the greater. I have thought long and anxiously before I could quite decide whether or not it was right of me to confide to one so young a painful and a guilty story, and if I have erred, may God forgive me for the mistake which I have made! Rosa, darling! I wish you to judge leniently of one who, throughout my life, has been very dear to me—of one whose own existence has been marked with many a sorrow, and who has at this moment a claim upon your tenderest sympathy. Rosamond! the man of whom I write is Mr. Santland—Mr. Santland, whom you have known but as a true and kind old friend—Mr. Santland, whom you must learn to love as a relation; for he is my father, darling!—my own, own father, and despite of all the past, despite of shame and guilt, my whole heart warms with love to him; and I joy to think that you, my Rosamond, will love him for my sake.”

Rosamond read thus far, and then, closing her eyes, held for a moment commune with her memory.

“ Her father !—my own mother’s father ! Ah ! she was right in thinking he will be dear to me. My grandfather, too ! How strange it sounds ! But then the letter speaks of guilt and shame ! What can it mean ? ” and half in wonder, half in fear, she proceeded with her task.

“ You are in some respects both wiser and older than your years,” wrote Mrs. Fendall ; “ and though, thank God ! you know but little of mankind’s worst sins, yet you have not now to learn how liable are all of us to err, and that mercy is sorely needed for each being that lives. Many years ago, my Rosa, Mr. Santland, who was then, as he is now, a clergyman, was assailed by a sore and great temptation. Of the particulars of what occurred during that trying time, I am in entire ignorance. All that I can tell you is that he devoted himself, heart and soul, to one who could not accept that heart’s rich tribute without guilt, for she was another’s wife, and to *him*, unworthy though he was, she owed her faith and duty. Rosamond, my child, to you in your pure innocence it seems almost a sacrilege to speak of sins like these ; but how, without revealing them, can I in any way fulfil my mission and guard my father’s and my mother’s name from ignominy ? There is no need to dwell

upon the guilt which followed on my father's love ; it is enough for you to know that the husband of the woman whom he idolized discovered all, and that my father bought his secrecy with gold ! The sum agreed upon between them was a large one, but not too large a price to pay for the security of an unsuspected woman's reputation, and for the credit of my father in the sacred profession he had chosen. But Ten thousand pounds could not, as you may suppose, be raised at once by one who had no private fortune of his own ; and therefore, to a certain extent, Mr. Earnshaw—did I tell you that his name was Earnshaw ?—was obliged to trust in promises, the while he received, during forty years of time, ample interest for the money which he reckoned on receiving at a future time. It would seem that, for some time previously to Mr. Earnshaw's settling at Parkfield House, he had been persecuting my poor father by letter with his urgent claims for payment ; and you may well conceive the distress of mind occasioned by his actual arrival. Since that time my father has not had a moment's peace in consequence of the threats of this base man, whom still I could have found it in my heart to pity, save for his eagerness to take in gold the recom-

pense for his dishonour. For, Rosamond, my father would have braved all to rescue her, and make her his, but this the man refused—refused to sue for a divorce, and kept her there beside him while she lived—it was not long—to torture and to punish her !”

“ Poor thing !” murmured Rosamond to herself, for sympathy in that young and unworld-taught breast was entirely with the weak, the loving, and the loved. “ Poor thing ! How sad a fate ! And she could never, I suppose, have known her child, for I have heard my mother say that of *her's* she could recall no memory.”

There was but one sheet now remaining of the letter, and Rosamond, with a heart wrung with conflicting emotions, read on to the end.

“ I have but little more to add, my darling, and only one request to make, which I feel certain you will grant. Mr. Earnshaw determined to see me at your grandfather's house, and, as you know, succeeded in his endeavour. He then judged (and I can well believe it) from my appearance, that if he wished for any aid from me there was no time to lose ; and he wrote me a short but meaning letter, which contained a covert threat against my father. What he wanted was security for his miserable money—

money which in forty years had been paid twice over! But—ah! God forgive me, Rosamond! for I am nursing evil feelings at the last, instead of forgiving, as I hope for pardon in my turn. He was very hard to satisfy when, the day after that wretched night, we met him, by appointment, at the lawyer's: perhaps, had he had a younger man to deal with, or a woman more spirited and courageous, we might have made better terms with him; but he was aware—how, we could not guess—that Sir Matthew was in ignorance of the disgrace attending my birth, and he had the cowardice to hold that knowledge as a threat over our heads. It was indeed a cruel day of trial, and it ended by all possible security being given to Mr. Earnshaw for the payment of his debt. Your precious life, my darling, is insured to the full amount, with the personal security of Mr. Santland (I do not understand law terms, and may not make this clear), that the moment it is in your power to do so, you will pay the ten thousand pounds in full.

“This, then, my darling, is my request to you—namely, that you will, to the best of your ability, contend against the influence of your cousins over Sir Matthew—in so far at least as

that influence might tend to place the payment of this money out of your power. Guard, too, your poor grandfather's secret, as you love your mother's memory. If I mistake not—God grant that I may wrong them—but if I mistake not, your cousins may make that secret an arm against you with their grandfather. Left to myself, so terrible a surmise might not perhaps have gained ground with me; but the Rector thinks it possible that such a plan may have been laid, and I have rarely known him deficient in penetration. And now, my child, the time has come for me to say farewell to the best, the truest, and the fondest daughter that ever comforted a mother's heart. Weary have been many of the days of my pilgrimage; for, Rosa, it was my great misfortune to love one so deeply and entirely that the void left by his loss could never be filled up. My health broke down the day your father died, and my last counsel to his child is, that she should guard her heart from a devotion so entire and exclusive. To those two bereaved ones—to the aged men who have both loved me dearly, I bequeath my child; and do you, my Rosamond, endeavour to supply my place beside them, while they live."

There were a few last words of fond affection, and then Rosamond had read the last lines her mother had, with weariness and difficulty, traced upon the tear-stained pages. She laid the letter upon her lap, and thought over its contents long and painfully.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SHIP IN DISTRESS.

THE Fendalls occupied a large and comfortable house in Brunswick Square. It was not a common lodging-house by any means, and Frederica often found herself suggesting to Myles, that but for their deep mourning some very pleasant parties might be given in those fine drawing-rooms, with their folding-doors, so convenient for the dancing in which her heart delighted.

"It is January now, and Aunt Bessie has been dead six weeks," she remarked, one dull and foggy morning, to Myles, who was going out with the "East Sussex," and had already equipped himself in what his sister considered his most becoming attire. "She has been dead six weeks, and I really think we might amuse ourselves a little."

"Not a little, but a good deal," said Myles, looking admiringly at her plump, well-dressed

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little figure, and at the shining golden hair which her deep mourning so well became. "Not a little, but a great deal; for the Westerhams and the De Bernys came yesterday, and I defy any one to be dull where they are."

Rica did not look as pleased by this intelligence as Myles anticipated. Perhaps his praise of their cousins offended her, for she said in the disparaging tone which her brother so well understood,

"Oh! the De Bernys! And how did you know they had come?"

"Dick Westerham told me so last night. I met him at the Club."

"Dick Westerham! Dandy Dick?"

"The very same; as large as life—larger, indeed, for the melancholy fact that Dick *se donne du ventre*, is no longer a secret to the world."

"I should rather like to see him," said Rica.

"You had better not. He is far better in imagination than in reality. Dick is not the dandy he was. Time and strife will tell on the boldest combatants, and in his hand-to-hand battle with Time, the crowsfeet have gained a

march on poor Dick Westerham. In short, dear Rica, I think you will agree with me, that appearances are against him."

The hours that followed her brother's departure passed dully enough; for throughout the morning, and, indeed, during the greater portion of the afternoon, thick, driving, and perpetual showers of mist continued to fall; not heavy rain certainly, but of the kind that is emphatically called "wetting," in contradistinction, probably, to the pelting storm, from the violence of which (deeming that the better part of valour is discretion) we escape at once for shelter and protection.

The two French windows opened upon a balcony, in which stood a few stunted plants in pots, which shook and rattled in the wind, and on the panes of glass the salt sea spray had laid a dingy covering, which the dull, evenly-descending mist was powerless to wash away. A long tedious morning had been spent by those within the room in watching, waiting, and hoping for a clearing up, and now four o'clock had struck by the clock which stood upon the writing-table, and still the mist drove on, while land and sea were enveloped in one huge white impervious cloud of vapour.

“What a detestable day ! And yesterday was no better,” said Rica, peevishly.

“And to-morrow will very likely be worse !” responded Rosamond, whose only consolation and pastime was her solitary ride upon the Downs, when, attended by a groom, she could indulge in silence and in mournful reverie. “It is too tiresome,” she continued, “too boring, to be kept at home all day. I only wish that I could go to sleep like grandpapa.”

The words were peevish words, but, nevertheless, there was no shade of irritation or of real discontent in the saddened heart of her who uttered them ; but Rosamond had yet to learn the value and the danger of outspoken words ; had yet to pause and dwell upon her sentences before she uttered them, and ponder well the chances of misconstruction.

She was not looking at her cousin, but out into the weather—out on the distant ocean, whose whereabouts she could but guess at, so lost was it in the density of the sea mist in which every object far and near seemed buried.

For an hour at least she had been stationed at the window, watching and hoping for a change, while Rica—for the afternoon was now far advanced—was seated close beside her white-

haired grandfather, as he slumbered peacefully in his easy chair.

At last—and not over cautiously, for Rosamond, although I grieve to say it, was thinking more of her ride than of Sir Matthew's nap—she broke out into an almost joyous exclamation of—

“Ship ahoy! Oh, Rica dear, it's clearing up! I see a boat—a sail out there; and further back”—(she was not very nautical in spite of the sailorlike expression which had rung out so melodiously from her rosy lips)—“and further back there is a great big ship, tossing so fearfully. Rica, do come and look at it.”

“Hush, dear; don't speak so loud, or you'll awaken grandpapa,” said Rica, in a whisper. She had noticed symptoms of awaking before the thoughtless outbreak; but this was all unknown to the grateful and aroused old man, who held his withered hand out to her kindly, which Rica took and kissed; and then, treading softly and on tiptoe to the window, she, too, *swept* (as the saying is) the now dimly-visible horizon with the telescope which Rosamond offered for her use.

“Heavens! What a great large ship!” exclaimed Frederica. “And how the wind has

risen in this hour! I can see her quite plainly now. Grandpapa, would you like to look through the glass? It is very nearly clear now, and the waves are dashing over her so grandly."

"No, my dear, thank you," answered the scarcely awake Sir Matthew. "I am sure it is very fine. I hope you are amusing yourselves;" and with a long-drawn breath he turned again to his repose.

"Hark!" cried Rosamond, a moment after, and still speaking aloud, for she half feared danger for the tossing ship, and was too much excited to be prudent. "Hark! They are firing guns! I am sure they are signals of distress! And see, Rica, how the people are running to the beach."

"For the life-boat, I suppose," said Frederica, in a calm whisper. "I wonder where Myles is? I hope he won't do anything foolish."

"And I," thought Rosamond, "hope that the poor people on board that ship have some better chance for safety than the exertions of Colonel Fendall in their behalf."

And then, as the ship drifted madly on, impelled towards the frowning cliffs by the merciless south-westerly gale, Rosamond won-

dered whether the Rector also was looking on the grandly awful sight ; for Mr. Santland had announced his intention, but a few days previously, of going for change of air and scene to a small village some ten miles east of Brighton, and his granddaughter pictured to herself the old man stationed at his window watching the tempest-tost vessel as she was hurried hopelessly to her destruction.

CHAPTER XXX.

DANDY DICK IN THE YELLOW LEAF.

By four o'clock the rain had entirely ceased, although the hurricane had by no means abated, and only the most adventurous of the young lady visitors at the gay sea-side watering-place were bold enough to dare the dangers and discomforts of a walk along the cliffs.

Of those few, Rica Fendall was one; for she dearly loved to be escorted by Myles on his return from hunting, to the broad Esplanade where they met their few acquaintances, and where she, leaning on her brother's arm, could listen to his lively remarks without feeling any of her prevailing fear that his attentions might be engrossed elsewhere.

"He will never marry" had grown to be the conviction amongst the many young ladies to whom he succeeded in making himself agreeable.

"Never," was the frequent response. "His

sister will prevent that. Why? Who can say?"

"It is very natural," some devoted sister might exclaim. "I'm sure I should be miserable if Robert married. I should hate his wife——"

"And hope that 'something would happen' to her before a year was out," suggested a rather sarcastic young Engineer officer, who had been listening to the conversation.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed the young lady indignantly. "Captain D——, how could you say anything so horrid? Of course, I never thought of anything so dreadful."

"No more did Miss Frederica Fendall, I am sure, when she broke off the marriage between her brother and poor Mary Knight. She thought the silly girl would soon recover it—would only feel it for a month or so; her pride would aid her to support the stroke, and——Ah, well, your sex are puzzling things. But the salve of wounded pride laid upon a heart's wound is of an irritating quality, and pricks sorely, doubtless, while it heals."

And Captain D——, who had perhaps some private reasons for dwelling on the wrongs of the forsaken Mary Knight, walked away from

his fair friends with a gloomy brow, and moodily.

But to return to Frederica's promenade that stormy day upon the Brighton cliffs. She had (as Myles was wont not unfrequently to remark) the very prettiest little feet and ancles in the world; and, although she might be too chary to "unmask their beauties to the moon," she was less particular when it was broad daylight on the Esplanade; so that Miss Fendall's little high-heeled boots and coquettish striped stockings were, on a windy day especially, the admiration of the sea-side loungers.

On the present occasion the brother and sister (for Myles had fulfilled his promise of returning in good time) were fortunate in their companions, for they had not taken half-a-dozen turns when they were joined by the De Bernys, "the most popular girls going," as Myles often said, "in the very best set," and certain to "go off."

"And pray what have you done with *cette chère Rosamonde*?" asked Hortense, almost immediately after "how-do-you-do's" had been exchanged. "I hope she does not mope. You should not permit her to *ennuyer* herself."

"We can't help it if she will be sulky," answered Rica. "It is not Myles' fault or

mine that she likes the groom's society better than ours. I ask her to walk with us every day, but she prefers to ride on the Downs—a singular taste, I think,” and Rica shrugged her shoulders with a gesture which might almost be called significant.

“There is no accounting for tastes,” put in Myles. “Rosamond had always a strong *penchant* for the beauties of nature. She was divided between them and her *engouement* for the wicked old gentleman at the Rectory. By the way, I should not be much surprised if she had ridden to W—— to-day, and is at this very moment engaged in tracing the marks of a cloven foot upon the shingle.”

“*Fi donc !* Colonel Fendall,” said Hortense, laughing. “To talk so of a *ministre*. It is too bad, and it is enough for Rosamond to love any man to make him good. We will ride with her to-morrow, Laura, ourselves ; and Colonel Fendall will say no more that she likes better riding with a groom.”

“We will make a party,” began Myles, but a touch from Rica's little *griffe de chatte* checked him at once, and he felt much relieved when the unexpected presence of Dandy Dick enabled him to give a turn to the conversation.

Colonel Fendall was one of those men who delight in the possession of a *butt*, and poor middle-aged, feeble-minded Dick Westerham, with his affectation of juvenility, his lisping words, and his varnished boots (a world too narrow for his gouty toes), was exactly the human target against which, seeing that there was no danger of retaliation, Myles could afford to waste the coarsest of his arrows, and the bluntest of his least original hits.

"Ha! old fellow, how d'ye do?" he said, gaily. "By-the-bye, Dick, I claim a friend's privilege to be informed when you wish the epithet 'Old Fellow' to be abandoned. There are such things as *mauvaises plaisanteries*, and I should be sorry——"

"Fine day. Seen the ship?" broke in Dick hastily, for the question chosen by his *friend* was decidedly distasteful, albeit he sought in vain in his empty quiver for an answering arrow. "Fine day. Wained all the mawning. Windy still. Looks bad faw to-mawwow. Glass going down fast."

"My dear fellow, you have not said a syllable which any of us can dispute; and when there is no subject for discussion, conversation must necessarily flag."

"But did you weawly see the ship?" again asked Dick, who seemed determined to turn a deaf ear to the suggestions of Myles. "The saiwors say she must go ashaw at Wottingdean, and I think I shall take a fly and see."

"Do, my dear Dick," said Colonel Fendall. "Spread the wings of Icarus at once. You will have a delicious bird's-eye view. I only wish that I possessed your powers of soaring. Good-bye. Tell us all about it when you return, and, above all, take care of yourself when you get into the rarified air. They say it's very bad for the lungs and the complexion," and Myles laughed heartily at his own wit, as Dick, with an attempt at juvenile jauntiness, walked off with great inward dissatisfaction in an opposite direction.

"It is a severe trial to a man past fifty," continued Colonel Fendall, "to walk away in a high wind from a party of people whom he knows are laughing at him. Poor dear Dick! His waist never felt to him so large before! And the back of his head! Laura, he knows better than you do the boundary-line between sham and reality. The back of his head, beneath his hat, is burning at this moment with conscious shame. Fifteen years hence, when I am going

down the hill, and hanging on, as Dick is, by my eyelids, I shall look back to *his* mistakes, and reap the benefit of his experience."

"In what way?" said Laura, who always encouraged Colonel Fendall to talk about himself.

"Oh! in every sense! In the first place I shall never trust my precious person in a gale of wind, which is merciless in the way of pointing out one's personal disadvantages; and in the next place, I shall make quite sure that in a walk like this I shall not be pursued by three young ladies making comments on my tender points."

"But we have made no comments," said Hortense. "No one has spoken but yourself."

"So much the worse for him. The most dangerous reflections are those which never see the light."

"His lisp is very ridiculous," said Laura. "I wonder why it is that old men—real old men, I mean—never make themselves absurd by *grassey-ing* in that way."

"It is a foible peculiar to the young," said Myles.

"And happily not a common or a contagious

one," said Hortense. "For lispers are the exception certainly, and not the rule."

"*Dieu merci !*" responded Colonel Fendall ;
"for to *lithp* in numbers would be indeed a slur upon the age ! "

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RESCUE.

THE next day, news of the drifting ship were in everyone's mouth. She was a small merchant vessel of about one hundred tons burthen, and had been wrecked near a small village, some miles to the eastward of Rottingdean. A few lives only had been saved, and those solely by the exertions of some brave sailors, who, headed and encouraged by a young man—a stranger to the place, but one evidently well acquainted with the sea, had perilled life and limb to save the perishing ones.

Particulars of the disastrous occurrence—whether true or false—were, of course, not wanting. Everyone had seen the ill-fated vessel driven before the gale, in a crippled state, with sails blown away, till, suddenly broaching-to, she lay in the trough of the sea, utterly unmanageable.

The suspense of those who watched the vessel from the land was soon over, as regarded the

fate of the ship herself, for, after a severe but hopeless struggle with the elements, she had been observed by those who brought the news of her shipwreck, to break up in fragments within an hour after she had struck upon a rock near shore.

The gale was at that time raging fearfully, and there was no life-boat near at hand, in which, through the tremendous breakers, a daring crew might venture to the rescue of those on board the sinking vessel. But though the life-boat was wanting, there were brave men present amongst the hardy fishermen of the coast, and only a leader was required to stimulate them to exertion.

There were groups of men and women on the beach, huddled together, vociferating, pitying, and suggesting. But all the while the crew on board the trader were no nearer to their deliverance, although they could plainly see the hundreds of fellow-beings who, from a place of safety, looked on their doomed ship, and the fearful fate which threatened them.

The question was—whether any of the boats, which lay drawn up on the shingle, could live in such a sea? The owners of those little craft had often boasted of their strength and seaworthiness, and yet, when such a test as this was

required of their capabilities, love of life proved stronger than nautical vanity, and the respective merits of the "Janes," the "Blue-eyed Maids," and the "Mariannes," were no longer brought forward by their possessors.

The women, too, who formed no inconsiderable portion of the crowd, were entirely against any risk being run for the sake of those who, though grievously to be pitied, were nevertheless nothing to *them*—whereas each and every one of those broad-chested, weather-beaten men, in his Guernsey frock and broad sou'-wester, had a wife or sweetheart, a mother or a sister, to whom his life was precious, and his safety necessary to her well-being.

And yet it was hard to look on quietly and see those fellow-creatures drown—for such, alas ! would be the destiny of the unhappy beings, were no strong efforts made to save them. Already (as they could plainly see) had more than one poor clinging mortal—feebler, perhaps, than the rest, been washed from his hold into the sea ; and tossed on the summit of the waves were fragments of the wreck, which told how rapidly the ship was breaking up.

"Another gone, by —— ! D—— me, but I'll launch the 'Jane !'" shouted a stout fisherman,

whose bronzed face and grizzled hair spoke of the many years of toil and danger he had passed. There was strong pity in his honest heart—and so may God forgive him for the thoughtless oaths he uttered.

“Not you, Dan’l!” cried a middle-aged woman, clinging to his sinewy arm, while the strong wind blew long meshes of her black hair about her face. “Not you, Dan’l! You’re always a-running into danger. Let the young fellows go as hasn’t got a chick or child, and you remember, man, that you’ve got seven—and the youngest a blessed babby in its cradle!” And, overcome by the thoughts of her helpless ones at home, the sailor’s wife burst into a flood of hysterical tears.

“Quiet, woman; quiet now, can’t ye,” said Dan’l, putting her aside with a strong hand, yet very gently, considering the excitement under which he was labouring—“Quiet now! See here, Mr. Elliot’s a-coming, and ye wouldn’t let him see us look like fools.”

The individual whose presence was thus abruptly announced was a young man of striking appearance, who approached in great haste and evident agitation.

“I say, my men,” he called out, the moment

he was within earshot, "what is this?—a drowning crew!—boats at hand! and not a soul to man them? Daniel! why, you and I have been out together in many a sea as wild as this. Run down the boat, men. With a will! Now, then, all together!" And, putting his own shoulder to the work, the man whom Daniel had designated as "Mr. Elliot" seemed resolved that example in the performance of their dangerous duty should not be wanting.

The women had all shrunk back on hearing the young man's reproachful words, and now stood together in a group eyeing him with looks which were far from friendly. Their relations and various belongings had not been backward in obeying the call made upon their courage, and every hand seemed ready now to lend its help towards the expeditious launching of the "Jane."

Down the shingly beach, the grating sound made by her keel mingling with the chorus of manly voices—loud, and soul-stirring—the heavy boat was run to the sea; Percy Elliot's clear shout ringing high above the rest, and his stout arm doing good service amongst that stalwart group.

There was but a fathom's length between them and the rushing surf, and one more vigour-

ous lengthened effort would send the "Jane" a floating thing upon the unstable sea, when Elliot felt his arm seized violently, and a woman screamed out in a voice which rose above the raging of the waves—

"Oh, sir! For God and Heaven's sake leave Dan'l here. Think of the little children. Take the men as hasn't got them. He's only going for you—going for you, because you saved him in the fever, and if you bid him stop he'll do it. Oh, sir! for mercy's sake, just say the word! Oh, God! Oh, God! he's in the boat," she cried, as Daniel, the moment that the "Jane" plunged into the deeper water, sprung into her and seized an oar.

There was no time for soothing now—for arguments or expostulations—for the boat was with difficulty kept from being dashed back upon the beach, and every moment's delay was fraught with danger.

Still Percy could not hear the woman's agonising cry unmoved, and a feeling for the helpless children who might so soon be fatherless prompted him to say a word of comfort to the terror-stricken woman.

"Daniel goes of his own free will to do his duty," he said, as in his turn he sprang into the

rocking, plunging craft. "But take this," and he placed his watch and a valuable ring into the hand that clung convulsively to the rope by which the "Jane" was still held by those on shore. "Take these; they are yours if Daniel should not return alive. And now let go, lads, and pull for the wreck like men."

There was barely a quarter of a furlong of foaming billows between them and the wreck, and although the daylight was beginning to wane, those on board the "Jane" could, as their small craft rose upon the white crests of the surging waves, see distinctly the now greatly-reduced numbers of those who still clung desperately to life upon the deck of the schooner.

"Give way, lads!" shouted Elliot, who, with a face calm in its iron resolution, steered the little vessel with a practised hand over the gigantic breakers which threatened at every moment to engulf them. "Give way! we're gaining ground. Ha!—a heavy sea that! We're nearing the wreck! Courage, and God save us all this night," he added solemnly, as with his disengaged hand he removed the sailor's hat he wore, leaving his head uncovered beneath the rain, which was now descending in torrents.

They were now but a few boat-lengths from

the wreck, the gale having, if anything, increased in violence, and the difficulty of contending against its force becoming infinitely greater as fatigue began to tell upon the rowers. They were in the trough of the sea, and two successive "seas" having broken over them, the *baler* was constantly at work, when, on the summit of a gigantic wave, which seemed about to topple over them, two little floating forms became successively distinctly visible. Very near, they passed them by—two infant children, clad in clinging snow-white garments, their fair hair resting on the water, images of peace amidst the desolation which surrounded them. Almost instinctively, the sailors rested on their oars—Daniel the first to pause, for he thought upon his little ones at home.

"Give way, lads!" shouted Percy's ringing voice again. "The children are in Heaven. Pull for the sake of those who yet remain alive!"

On floated the tiny corpses towards the shore, and onwards steered that fearless man to the doomed rocking ship. It was no easy task to near her—no easy task to take on board the few exhausted ones remaining on the parting decks. There were but five of them, men and boys; for

the one woman, the mother of those departed little ones, had been long since swept into the angry sea.

There was a deep throb of gratitude to God in Percy's heart as the last of those rescued victims (he was a young lad, who was drawn forcibly from the cabin, where he had been lying in a state of insensibility) was placed in the rescuing boat amongst the gallant fellows who had performed their duty so nobly and so well. And not too quickly done had been the work of mercy ; for ere the laden boat could reach the shore, where hundreds stood to welcome them with shouts of triumph, the schooner's hull was scarcely visible above the waters, and the sea was covered with the floating remnants of the wreck.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHROUDED IN MIST.

ON the day following the wreck of the "Amelia," Rosamond received the following letter from Mr. Santland:—

"My dear," he wrote,— "I have been the witness to a piteous sight, and yet, methinks that I would not have missed it, for it has shown me how brave men can risk their lives, and how God does sometimes, in his justice, remember mercy. I have seen, my dear, a noble deed performed, without bravado and display, whilst I, a poor worn-out old man, could only stand upon the shore and wish that I could even pray for them. You will have heard ere this of the young man who was the leader and master-spirit of those who saved the five survivors from the wreck of the 'Amelia.' His name is Percy Elliot; but beyond this I can tell you little. It would seem, from what I heard some women say while he was rowing to the wreck, that this

young gentleman—this Mr. Elliot, whose name is now in all men's mouths—has been for some time living with an old relation in the neighbourhood of this village. One among the crying, sobbing creatures said that he had often come amongst them, and that lately, when her children had the fever, he had given them medicines which had cured them, and had not been afraid (she said) to stand beside the children's beds when even the neighbours kept away for fear of the disease. So, hearing this, I felt an interest in him, and as we—the men and women, fathers, wives, and brothers—crouched down beside a boat upon the shingle, with our eyes fixed upon the tossing boat, I fancied what he might be like—that 'good young man,' as the sailor's wife had called him—and wished for his return, that I might thank him in their name. But, Rosa, the worst of all the piteous tale is yet to come; for before they could return (which they did, as you have heard, in safety), two little children's bodies came floating to the shore—two little girls, upheld by their white garments, and tossed by the waves' action towards each other as they were swept against the shingly beach. They were washed upon the shore quite near us—the dear, dear creatures, with their dripping

hair, and sweet, fair faces still in death ; and as I looked upon their sleeping innocence, I seemed to care but little for the lives of guilty men."

The letter ended so—abruptly and without further comment. Rosamond was deeply touched by its contents, which she read out in part to Rica and to Myles.

"How very sad!" exclaimed the former, and then added, "but Percy Elliot!—what an aristocratic name! I hope we shall hear more about him. Myles, do make some inquiries concerning him. He seems quite a hero."

"I knew a man of the name once," responded Colonel Fendall; "but it is hardly likely to be the same, inasmuch——"

"Inasmuch——" repeated his sister, seeing that he hesitated.

"Oh! nothing. It is certainly not the same person. Indeed, I am not sure that the name of the man I mean was Percy, after all. It positively was Elliot; but that is by no means an uncommon name, and P, which was my acquaintance's initial letter, might stand for Philip, or Paul, just as easily."

"Or even for Peter," added Rica, laughing; while Rosamond, thinking solely of her letter, wondered how she could contrive to see the

Rector, and gain from him further particulars of this interesting and tragical event.

"Besides," she murmured to herself, "he must be very lonely where he is, and a visit there from me might cheer him."

The third day's post brought, rather to her surprise, another letter from Mr. Santland. He did not ask to see her, but he evidently wished it; and the proof of his low spirits broke out in every line he wrote.

"What you say of pity for the *left*, I feel most truly" (these were the Rector's words); "but in the case of those little children's family, there are none left to commiserate, since, fortunately, all went together. There was a poor little brother floating on the waves some miles away. Oh! this poor family! How fearful is the change made in them by one single night of horror, pain, and misery! That last morning that ever they rose, those poor little girls were dressed by the hands of a sailor youth (the same whom afterwards Elliot rescued with such difficulty), for the distracted mother could not do it."

"How terribly his nerves are shaken!" said Rosamond, to herself; "and yet he says no word of wishing for my coming! Ah! my poor

mother would have known better how to act, while I can only grieve over *his* loneliness and my own useless inexperience."

A few days elapsed after the receipt of the Rector's last letter, and all but Rosamond had well-nigh forgotten the sad tragedy which had at first so strongly roused their sympathy. *Her* mind was, however, more attuned to melancholy thoughts and subjects, and seldom did an hour elapse without her busy, saddened fancy conjuring up some of the scenes which the Rector had described, and living over, gloomily (it is a kind of *treat* which women sometimes allow themselves), the horrors of those distracting moments.

The weather since the shipwreck had continued stormy and uncertain, so that Rosamond's daily rides had been for some time prevented; but there came at last a morning which looked more propitious, and, taking advantage of a better prospect seaward, she ordered her horse, and set off soon after breakfast on her solitary expedition.

As usual, she turned her horse's head towards the open Downs, with the old groom—one of the most ancient of the family retainers—following her at the accustomed orthodox distance.

There was scarcely a breath of wind to relieve the heaviness of the mild February day ; but that breath, faint although it was, came over the now waveless sea, and ever and anon a slight saline mist was wafted towards her, damping the black crape veil which fell over her face.

She was riding slowly on, her eyes fixed on the moist shining mane of her gentle-tempered mare, the while her thoughts were far away, when she was surprised by old Simon the groom who, riding up and touching his hat, said, in rather an anxious tone—

“ I beg your pardon, Miss Rosamond, ma’am, but it seems to me we’d best turn homeward, for the weather’s a-getting thick, and it’s likelier to get dirtier, I’m thinking.”

Rosamond raised her head at this intimation, and looked about her.

Thick ! Aye, thick it was indeed ! So thick, that she could but just see Myrza’s silky ears as they were pricked quickly up on hearing Simon’s voice.

“ Home ! ” Rosamond said, involuntarily ; and then, oppressed with that strange sensation of bewilderment which, to the nervous, is often the consequence of a fog so impenetrable as the one

which had so unexpectedly overtaken them, she added—

“How dark and still it is! and we must be very far from the town! Simon, we must not move, but wait here till the fog clears off; for we are so near the cliff that a single step may lead us to destruction!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE "HERO" MAKES HIS FIRST APPEARANCE.

ROSAMOND threw back her thick veil, and strove, but strove in vain, to penetrate the wall of ocean mist which surrounded her on every side. She could not in any degree estimate their distance from the edge of the high cliff which rose almost perpendicularly from the shingly beach; but she fancied—it might be *only* fancy—that she heard the dull monotonous sound of the waves as they rolled slowly on the shore.

Save for that one faint sound, which seemed to rise upon the air at intervals, all was silent as the grave; for even the horses appeared aware that there was peril near them, and remained quite motionless, hanging their heads with an air of drooping apprehension.

"How long do these sea mists last, I wonder?" said Rosamond, more to break the oppressive stillness than from any expectation

she entertained of gleaning grounds for hope from Simon's answer.

"Well, I couldn't say, Miss Rosamond. Sometimes they clear away quite sudden like, and other whiles they last the day, I'm minding."

Rosamond's heart sank within her. To think of a day—twelve long mortal hours, perhaps, to be passed in a situation so awful! What should she do? Her nerves weakened by sorrow, and her health impaired by brooding on her griefs, would surely fail her during the lengthened trial; and the reflection that she was alone with poor old helpless Simon, whose ideas were circumscribed to stable subjects, and whose bodily powers had long been on the wane, was far from consolatory.

Still, and in default of a more efficient counsellor, she found herself applying to Simon for advice.

"What can we do, Simon?" she said. "We cannot remain here for hours; and the cold makes me tremble so!"

"Can't say, Miss Rosamond, indeed," replied the old man. "Surely if we knew where we was, we might move on, but as it is, best stay where we be awhile."

Rosamond said no more. She was, as she had just remarked, shaking all over with fear and cold; her teeth were "chattering," and her numbed hands could scarcely retain their hold upon the bridle.

"It's a pity we come so far," mumbled Simon. "We be as much as eight miles from Brighton, for sure."

He had scarcely spoken, when the loud, deep baying of a hound, followed and repeated in the distance by others of his kind, was heard distinctly; and far away although it was, Rosamond's heart beat joyfully at the welcome sound.

But, alas! other ears besides her own had caught the familiar cry, for Myrza, who had been bred in a hunting county, and whose heart was with the hounds, bounded forward in an ecstasy of delight.

"Oh, Simon!" cried poor Rosamond, "Myrza will not stand! What shall I do?"

"Hold her hard by the 'ead, miss!" shouted Simon *somewhere* from the fog, though far away already as it seemed to Rosamond, as Myrza, irritated by her mistress's restraining hand, tossed her small head, backed, reared, and finally plunged forward.

But great as had been the mare's momentary excitement, her perfect mouth and temper were soon evidenced by her relaxed speed, a result to which the entire cessation of the hounds' voices had not a little contributed.

Rosamond, who had almost given up her life as lost, breathed again when Myrza, showing obedience to the tightened rein, subsided into a walk. In her delight she patted the mare's neck with more than her wonted tenderness, and experienced a still further glow of satisfaction as her ears caught the ringing sound of a cock's shrill crow, which appeared to come from but a very short distance on her right.

At once she turned her horse's head in that direction, for although the mist was still as hopelessly impenetrable as ever, she felt certain that she could not be mistaken as to the quarter from whence the sound proceeded.

"What an escape I have had," she murmured to herself. "But poor Simon! I wonder where he is! His horse, though, seemed far more manageable than mine, and Myrza did not gallop far." And with the faint expectation that the old man might hear her voice, she called his name aloud.

There was no answer, as Myrza, walking

now with prudent step enough, bore her young mistress onward.

Again, and again she called, and she was beginning to long for a repetition of the welcome warning she had heard, when she felt her bridle suddenly seized, while a violent jerk backwards threw Myrza almost on her haunches.

There was a fervent cry of "Thank God!" from a voice which certainly did not belong to the ancient serving-man, and then Rosamond for the first time perceived that she was not alone, for the figure of a man who was a stranger to her appeared dimly visible beside her horse's head.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RIGHT MAN IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

CONSIDERING that the hero of an adventure had just made his appearance as her rescuer, it was something to Rosamond's credit that she did not faint. She was, however, considerably agitated, and not a little at fault as regarded the motive of the stranger's conduct. He, too, seemed, by his momentary silence, to be labouring under some slight embarrassment; and when he uttered a low "I beg your pardon," Rosamond began to imagine that she really must have something to forgive.

The solution of the mystery was meanwhile close at hand, for with a suddenness frequently noticeable in such cases, the thick mist rolled away as though it had been a curtain, and passing onward over the land, displayed the sun-lit sea reposing tranquilly beneath them!

Beneath them? Yes. For Myrza's fore-feet were even now not ten yards from the verge of

the giddy height, and but for the stranger's timely aid, both horse and rider would now be lying, crushed and mangled, a hundred feet below the spot on which they stood.

Rosamond at once saw the fearful danger from which she had escaped, and her feelings (as would have been the case with most of her sex, whether heroically disposed or otherwise) found relief in tears.

The stranger—whom it will save trouble to announce at once as Percy Elliot—watched her in silence as the relieving flood poured down. His hand was upon Myrza's mane, and his searching eyes were fixed upon his young companion's face. He was a very handsome man, with fair waving hair, and hands and feet of delicate and aristocratic proportions.

"How can I ever thank you enough?" sobbed Rosamond, at last. "But for you I should have been killed, and poor Myrza——" But here she broke down entirely, overcome by the idea of Myrza's escape from destruction.

"Poor Myrza's instinct did not stand her in much stead," said Elliot, with a grave smile; "and these fogs are very dangerous. Are you quite alone?" he asked, looking round him in evident surprise at her apparent isolation.

Rosamond blushed, as for the first time the peculiarity of her situation occurred to her.

“Alone now,” she said. “But only a few minutes ago I had an old servant with me. I have not seen him since my horse broke away. And when I see how fearfully near the cliff we have been standing, I tremble for the poor old man.”

He looked with strong admiration on her glowing eager face, and then said in a soothing voice, as he laid his hand again on Myrza’s bridle—

“Come, then, we will commence a search for your servant, though I have little doubt of his safety; for I imagine, from what you say, that he is not likely to have been carried away by a dangerous amount of juvenile ardour.”

Without waiting for her consent he led the mare away—led her along the smooth short grass on which the sheep were feeding silently, and away from the frowning cliff which had nearly been the scene of a tragedy so fearful.

Rosamond tried in vain to speak again the gratitude with which her heart was filled, but she was still painfully overcome by her emotion; and till she could be assured of the old groom’s

safety, words would not come at her command.

After a few minutes employed in descending a rather steep grassy slope, they came in sight of a cottage, or rather a very small farmhouse, nearly buried among evergreen trees. The approach to the house was by a narrow footpath, entered by a wicket-gate, and to the post of that gate was tied a horse, which Rosamond recognised at once to be Simon's.

She uttered a cry of relief at the sight.

"Simon's horse?" said Elliot, with a smile. "I was sure of it. And there is Simon himself," as the old servant advanced towards them from the door of the house, hat in hand, and with a composure which his mistress was far from sharing.

"God be thanked, Miss Rosamond," he said, as he came near. "I was a-feared it would be a bad business when the mare made off. But then, you see, I knows her mouth! And as to following—Lor' bless you!—'twould just have made her madder like; so it was best keep quoit, and hope as how she'd take the right road of her own 'ead."

"You acted like a sensible man," began Elliot; but Rosamond interrupted him by saying eagerly—

“Simon, you must thank this gentleman for saving my life. But for him I should have been dashed to pieces on the strand, for Myrza’s feet were not a yard from the verge of the cliff when his hand stopped her, and, God be thanked! I am alive to bless him for the deed!”

“And God be thanked, too, Miss Rosamond, say I, and this good gen’l’mán as well. Sir, I have lived man and boy better than sixty years in the Hazel Combe family, and so I may make bold to say, I thank ye, sir.”

“Not much to thank for, my good man,” rejoined the stranger; “at least, as far as regards any great amount of exertion on my part. I happened to be caught, as you were, in the mist, and took refuge in that cottage till it should clear up. It was no thanks to me that this young lady called your name aloud, or that the wind, setting this way, wafted the sound towards me.”

“It was God’s Providence,” murmured Rosamond, in a low voice. “But is it not strange,” she continued, “that while you were guided towards me unerringly, my ears should have been so deceived by the crowing of that ventriloquising bird” (and she smilingly pointed to a strutting barn-door monarch) “as to wander in

exactly the opposite direction to the right one?"

"Nothing very surprising in that," said Percy; "for sounds often play us fantastic tricks in fogs as thick as the one which lately enveloped us. And if ever you should chance to find yourself again in a similar predicament, my advice is——"

"Just to hold the cattle hard by the 'ead," put in Simon, to the amusement of Elliot and Rosamond, whose spirits were gradually rising under the influence of pleasant companionship, a bright sun, and gratitude for a great deliverance.

"But I'm thinking, Miss Rosamond," added the old servant, again touching his hat, as if in extenuation of the liberty he was about to take; "I'm thinking it's a growing late, and that we'd better be making 'omewards. The 'osses have been out since ten o'clock, and now it's six a-most, I'm thinking, sir."

"Wants a quarter," said Percy, taking out his watch. "And if you have far to ride, Miss Fendall" (Rosamond wondered how he guessed her name); "if you have far to ride, the sooner you 'make tracks,' as Simon suggests, the better."

Rosamond's only reply to this advice was putting her horse in motion. Simon dropped behind into his befitting place, and with Percy walking by the young girl's side, the little party turned their heads towards Brighton.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MYLES FALLS IN WITH A RELATION.

THE sea mist, which had nearly proved so fatal to Rosamond Fendall, had not spread to any great distance along the coast, and at Brighton, eight miles from the scene of danger, the afternoon had been bright and clear.

The best "season" (for it was now the middle of January), was at its height. Every house was occupied, the cliffs were thronged with carriages, and the promenades by gaily dressed pedestrians. The sun on that particular afternoon was shining warmly as on an April day; and in the West Cliff Square, where a military band, "by kind permission of the colonel," was performing for the amusement of the "visitors," a dense crowd of pleasure-seekers was collected.

Walking about upon the grass in pairs, or in parties of larger size, young ladies and gentlemen laughed, talked, and flirted; many a tender whisper being (under cover of the sounding

trombones and bassoons) caught by the attentive ears of the pretty promenaders, as they tripped along with airs of demure unconsciousness—their hands in the pockets of their pea-jackets, and their little feet keeping time to the spirit-stirring airs which crashed out from the brazen band.

Myles Fendall was very much engaged that afternoon in playing the agreeable—a play which, as some (besides the sarcastic Engineer officer) had ventured to assert, had been “death” to the one poor girl whose affections he had tampered with, and who now lay cold and still beneath the churchyard sod.

“Who can be so absurd as to believe in the nonsense of a broken heart?” Colonel Fendall was saying to Laura de Berny. “Ask the doctors whether the term itself is not ridiculous.”

“The term, yes,” said Hortense, who often ventured to disagree with the “setting-down” Colonel. “The term may be as ridiculous as you please, but it will do for want of a better. There is not a doctor who will not tell you that the foundation of many a woman’s fatal complaint is laid by grief, and that the action of the heart——”

But Myles rarely listened when he was being talked reason to, and as he never made love to

Hortense de Berny, he turned towards her more congenial sister, and trusting for success to the sonorous clamour of the music, pursued his flirtation, unheard even by the watchful guardian who was, as usual, within earshot.

There was a very aristocratic assemblage that day in Brunswick Square ; for fashion had apparently migrated for a few short weeks to that noisy, bustling watering-place ; and Myles Fendall, looking round, saw himself surrounded by the gods and goddesses of his idolatry.

There was Lady A—— ; tall, erect, and fearless, with her masculine walk, her deep-set voice, and her consciousness of unusual popularity. There was Lady B—— ; thrice widowed—rich—low-born—followed—courted. While Lady C——, by birth still lower in the social scale, but who, with the command of money, which gives command of men, had only to hint an invitation, and Royalty, as well as the far mightier autocrat called Fashion, was ready at her call.

To each and all of these had Colonel Fendall for months past payed his court—humbly, subserviently. He had not reaped much reward as yet—for his work, as we have seen, was all up hill ; and for many an inch which, with infinite labour, he had gained, an ell was lost by some

unhappy *contretemps*, as unexpected as its consequences were frequently deplorable.

Still, on the whole, Myles gained some ground. He could bow, without being taxed with liberty-taking, to Lady A——; and sometimes Ladies B—— and C—— would patronize him by a gracious word, when he had found an opportunity of showing himself to be their humblest slave.

He was not sorry to display himself on this occasion as the admitted attendant of the De Berny girls. Count de Berny, too, their father, was just then at Brighton; and as a Count, and a Frenchman, a member of the Jockey Club, and a man remarkable for his *nonchalant* impertinence, he was of course *fêted* and admired by the London world of fashion.

L'arrivée de mon père—an event long talked of and frequently delayed—had certainly not tended to increase the happiness of his daughters. For the Count was one of those men who are only tolerably agreeable out of their own family. At home he was tyrannical—worrying and troublesome about trifles, boastful of imaginary personal sacrifices, violent in temper, and utterly incapable of a tender or paternal feeling.

Count de Berny was sufficiently acquainted with London society to be well aware of the importance to his daughters of an English introduction into the world. He knew—none better—that if Englishmen *seldom* marry penniless girls, his own countrymen are *never* known to be guilty of an act so insane ; and as Hortense and Laura had little besides their pretty looks and ways to take to the matrimonial market, Count de Berny rightly judged that the exposition of their merits had best take place on British ground.

He had left his darling Paris—the Paris in which alone his soul delighted—in order that he might judge for himself how far *les demoiselles* De Berny had taken advantage of his counsels and were *en train* to make really satisfactory *marriages de convenance*. And the result of his investigations had hitherto been anything but satisfactory.

“*Je ne comprends pas*,” he said one morning, soon after his arrival, to Lady Westerham, “why it is that your English girls marry at all. It is always flirting, always talking to this man because he talks *des riens* well, and to that man because he looks everything still better ; and all the while, the right man—the man which has *les*

livres sterling—looks on, and *finalement* retires without proposing.”

Lady Westerham could not resist a laugh at her son-in-law’s alarm.

“You must give us the results of your experience,” she said jestingly, “and set all our English girls to rights.”

“*All* is too much—a large order as you say,” rejoined the Count; “but, *si je ne me trompe pas*, I shall arrange Hortense and Laura *convenablement*, as we shall see.”

Good-natured Lady Westerham sighed over the gloomy prospect which she saw looming in the path of her light-hearted granddaughters; but the Count was not a man with whom she cared to remonstrate, inasmuch as (Frenchman though he was) opposition invariably led to his forgetfulness of the manners of a gentleman, and on occasions where a reference to facts was necessary he was apt to be carried away by an imagination which rarely erred on the side of truth.

“And where is papa, this afternoon?” whispered Colonel Fendall to Laura, who looked round as he spoke, fearing to see near her the portly form of the once elegant Count de Berny—the *lion* of the *Bois*, and *l’enfant chéri des dames* whose Paradise is Paris.

But Laura need not have been alarmed, since at that moment the strongest wish of what Count de Berny called his heart was that his younger daughter should captivate Colonel Myles Fendall, of Hazel Combe. It was true that the Colonel had the misfortune to be illegitimate—but what then? Was there not a bar sinister across the arms of half the noble families of England? And was not the grandfather very old—in second childhood nearly? And then Hazel Combe was such a fine old place, and people said the old man had laid by great wealth which he could leave to whom he would.

Yes, it was all as clear as day, and as smooth as sliding upon ice, that Sir Matthew, who seemed so fond of Myles, would make him his heir, and that Laura should become the young man's wife.

At that very moment, though they knew it not, the Count was, with much inward satisfaction, watching them from no great distance—even from the window of Sir Matthew's house, which looked down upon the brilliant crowd amongst whom Myles Fendall and the pretty foreign girls were mingling. Nothing, however, could be farther than marriage from the thoughts of the two concerning whom

Count de Berny was building so pleasant an aërial castle ; for Myles' whole attention, notwithstanding the occasional words he addressed to his companions, was engaged by a hope that some one or other of the great ladies would condescend to honour him with her notice ; while Laura, the infatuated girl ! had fixed her truant fancy on a broad-shouldered major of dragoons, to whose elbow she could scarcely reach, but whose blundering attentions and cubic inches had been for a week past making havoc with her affections.

He had his eye upon her now—that big-whiskered athlete, with his “beaming helmet” and clanking sabre (they formed no inconsiderable portion of Major Walker's attractions in Laura's sight)—and at every turn she took with Myles, *her* sister and *his* following close behind, the wicked dragoon would give her such a look ! —he had not many words at his command, but his eye was very powerful—and Laura (the cunning little flirt !) would just glance up from beneath the brim of her killing little hat ; while every officer, both in and out of barracks, knew for a certain fact that the “Major's business was done,” and that “old Walker” had “put his foot into it.”

It was well for Laura that Colonel Fendall's self-pre-occupation had hitherto prevented his seeing the incipient flirtation in which she was so rashly engaging ; for if there existed one human being for whom Myles nourished a greater contempt than for another, that individual was the ponderous Major of a heavy dragoon regiment.

Merciless would have been his "chaffing," could he have looked within the heart of his laughing, joyous-mannered cousin, and no stone would he have left unturned in his endeavours to convince her of the extreme bad taste of which she was showing herself guilty. As yet, however (and for that day especially), she was safe ; for, after the fourth turn which the little party had taken, another and a far older acquaintance of the Colonel's crossed their path, and challenged all his attention.

The individual in question was an elderly woman, whose age might be between sixty and seventy, and whose dress, of a fashion long since passed away, could not fail to attract the notice of any observer whose taste for the ridiculous was in the ascendant. The velvet bonnet of huge dimensions, with its one curlless feather ; and the long cloth cloak clinging closely to a

figure guiltless of crinoline, were enough in themselves to attract observation ; and when to these peculiarities are added the facts that she was a person of singularly large dimensions, and could boast of an independent, and even a defiant air, I think it will be admitted that her claims on public attention were indisputable.

Supported by the arm of this old-fashioned-looking personage was a man, apparently some few years younger than herself, and who was evidently feeble both in person and in mind. His companion seemed very attentive to his comfort, and to those who took the trouble to observe them it might have been evident that she entered into and explained the scene which they were witnessing, and also that, with patient kindness, she stationed herself with him near the music, humouring his curiosity as she would that of a cared-for child.

Once had Myles Fendall passed this man and woman without noticing their presence, but the second time that he had unwittingly approached them Laura's attention had been drawn in their direction by the remarks of some of the bystanders, and she said, in a half-whisper—

“ Colonel Fendall—Hortense—pray look this

way ! *Mon Dieu ! Mais regardez, donc ! Quel monde singulier !*”

Myles did as he was requested, but his curiosity was soon satisfied, for in the large, conspicuously-dressed figure near him he at once recognised the substantial form of Mary Hannum—Aunt Mary, his mother’s sister—one whom he had never yet had the misfortune to come in contact with beyond the precincts of her own comfortable farm, where the fact of her near relationship was an affair of little moment. But here the case was widely different; and what, in the name of all that was “accursedly” unfortunate, had brought Aunt Mary so many miles away from the Broadlands Farm? was the question which, quick as lightning, flashed across Colonel Fendall’s mind.

Had she come there in search of him? It was highly probable that such had been the worthy woman’s motive, for Myles had sadly neglected her of late—had ceased to answer her letters, and had, in short, shown strong symptoms of ignoring her existence, and setting at naught the ties of blood between them.

Then, too, Aunt Mary possessed what *she* herself called a spirit of her own, but which her friends were in the habit of denominating a

“temper.” It was not a peevish, nor a rancorous temper, nor was it one which could materially affect the comfort of those who lived with her: but Aunt Mary had a warm heart, and with it the quick, sensitive, and often jealous disposition which frequently accompanies an organ so inconveniently constituted. Power, also—the power she wielded as uncontrolled mistress over a two-hundred-acre farm—had rather fostered than diminished her peculiar tendencies; a truth which her nephew Myles had on several occasions not been slow to perceive.

At the moment when Laura drew her cousin’s attention to Mrs. Mary Hannum and her strange-looking companion, there chanced to be stationed near the Band several of those whose good opinion Colonel Fendall was most desirous to conciliate. He saw his critical predicament with the eye of one who feels that his social safety hangs upon a thread. What if Aunt Mary, stirred by the voice of nature within her, should turn round and recognise him? What if she should accost him before the very eyes of Lady A——? And what if Ladies B—— and C—— should hear her address him with loathsome familiarity as “Myley”? .

Full of such terrible reflections as these he kept his head resolutely turned away, forming while he did so the determination to make his escape from the scene as speedily as circumstances could permit.

But "the best-laid schemes of mice and men" (ay, even the ingenious plots of such cunning actors as the Colonel) "gang aft agley," and at the very instant when a break both in the crowd and conversation permitted him to see an opening for departure, a loud and well-known voice hailed him from the balcony.

"Fendalle! Hollo! Myles, *mon cher*. *Ici*—come here. Myles, dere is de prettiest—I say, Myles!"

The name was repeated so often, and resounded so clearly after the sudden cessation of a brilliant *morceau* from the "Figlia del Reggimento," that the attention of almost every one present was attracted to the window whence the voice which had called so loudly upon "Myles" proceeded.

Amongst the rest, the lady in the *incroyable* bonnet turned her attention, first to the balcony, where stood De Berny in the graceful attitude he could so well assume, and thence her gaze wandered to the place amongst the crowd on

which that gentleman's gaze was fixed. Then her eyes at once rested upon Myles!—*her* Myles!—her *nevey*!—her own sister's son!—he whom she had taken to her arms when he was a little wailing infant, and who in his early boyhood had been unto her as a son!

Several years had elapsed since old Aunt Mary had seen the soldier nephew of whom she had been so proud; several years—for since the day when Myles was last at Broadlands he had been in far distant lands—in the Kaffir wars, as well as throughout the great Crimean struggle—and he had, moreover, grown into an exceedingly fine and imposing-looking gentleman in the long years during which Aunt Mary had lost sight of him.

But “fine” and imposing-looking though he was, Mrs. Mary Hannum knew her boy at once, and darting forward, she seized him by the arm with eager tenderness.

“My boy!” she cried; “my own Myles! Why, what a fine gentleman you have grown to be, my dear. And here is Uncle Joseph. He's rayther hard of hearing is your uncle. And now, Myles, that I've found you out at last, my dear, let's go over to the ‘Ship,’ where we are staying, and we'll have a bit of dinner and a talk.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ROSAMOND FEELS HERSELF SUPPLANTED.

“WHERE can they be?” was Frederica’s exclamation, as for the fiftieth time at least she walked to the window, and looked out on the now gas-lighted Square.

It was nearly seven o’clock—Sir Matthew’s dinner hour—and neither Myles nor Rosamond had as yet made their appearance. Rica was growing very anxious; as was her habit during any lengthened and unexplained absence of her brother’s. She had a trick—a foolish woman’s trick—of fancying that some evil had befallen him, and was restless and uneasy in her movements, and somewhat irritable in her temper, during those moments of suspense and uncertainty.

“Where can they be, indeed, my dear?” repeated Sir Matthew, who looked quite ready for his dinner, with his snow-white waistcoat and

the flower in his button-hole, with which his attentive elder niece invariably presented him.

"I have not an idea, grandpapa," rejoined Rica, turning round an agitated face, which had the moment before been glued to the window-pane. "I have not an idea, and Myles' absence quite troubles me, he is always so wonderfully punctual. Rosamond's absence need not surprise us, for she would ride any distance over the Downs with Myrza and old Simon. Ha! there is a ring!—his ring! How glad I am! Grandpapa, will you wait five minutes while he dresses, or will you have the dinner up at once?"

"Oh, wait, my dear, of course," replied the courteous old gentleman; and Rica hurried down stairs to make sure that her brother's comfort and convenience were properly attended to.

A quarter of an hour later, and the trio were seated at dinner—Myles at the foot, and Rica in her absent cousin's place at the head of the table. The vacant chair and the folded napkin opposite to him bore to Sir Matthew's eyes a melancholy appearance, and more than once he laid down his knife and fork to wonder what had become of Rosamond.

The others, too, were listening more intently

than they cared to own (for so late a return was, on the absent one's part, totally unprecedented); and it was with a feeling of satisfaction that they heard at last the sound of horses' feet stopping at the door.

"There she is!" cried Rica, clapping her hands, for she was really pleased. "Myles, go and help her—bring her in. Let us hear what she has been doing all these hours."

It took but a minute to assist Rosamond from her horse and lead her with glowing cheeks, and long dark hair dripping with moisture, into the drawing-room. She went straight up to her grandfather, and, parting his white hair upon his brow, kissed it tenderly.

"It was not my fault, grandpapa," she said; "I was lost in the mist, and we were so near the sea without knowing it. I have had a great escape; and I am thankful, oh, so very thankful! that I am alive to tell you of it."

"And now," said Rica, in the thin unsympathising voice which always put a speedy stop to Rosamond's bursts of feeling, "now—would it not be more to the purpose if you were to take off your habit?"

"And have something to eat," suggested Myles, who was good-natured enough when his

own interests did not interfere with his amiability ; " you must be famished after your long ride, and spending so many hours in the air."

" A *demoiselle errante* wandering about the country," added Rica ; while Sir Matthew, who had not yet released his granddaughter's hand, was looking at her with eyes full of affectionate inquiry.

" I will tell you all my adventures, dear grand-papa, when you have had your dinner, and I my tea. I hope you did not wait for me. I am so sorry I have given so much trouble," and Rosamond, whose heightened colour made her (as Myles had often noticed had been the case of late) look wonderfully pretty, left the dining-room to change her dress, and think over her reception.

It was very evident that her lengthened absence had not occasioned any very painful emotions of anxiety in the breasts of her relations. It was too clear that they had sat down to dinner at the appointed hour ; and equally clear, from the empty plates she saw before her, that the appetites of none of the party had been injured by anxiety on her account.

There was something chilling in all this. Of course, she was glad to think they had not been

distressed, and she was relieved by the conviction that the two hours of agitation and dark forebodings which *she*, under similar circumstances, would have endured, had not fallen to the lot of those whose evening meal she had been prevented from sharing. But satisfied though she was—and, of course, comforted—by the conviction that she had not been the unwitting cause of sorrow and inconvenience, there was yet, as I have said, something very heart-chilling in the apathy which her cousins had displayed.

As regarded her dear old grandfather, too, she could not feel quite happy. She remembered the time—and that not so very long ago—when, had he missed his Bessie's daughter even for a short half-hour, he would have wandered restlessly about, asking incessant questions concerning her of those about him, and only appearing consoled and happy when the loved one was again beside him, relating the trivial reasons for her short delay, and listening in return to his complaints—repeated with the garrulity of age—of the anxiety he had undergone, and the fears he had entertained on her account.

Rosamond had found it very pleasant to be loved by those around her. She had been

nursed and reared—fed and nourished, on affection. On looking back—and she often did so now—she could not remember a moment throughout her eighteen years of life in which the shadow of neglect or of unkindness had fallen upon her spirit. And then, too, she had been accustomed to imagine herself as being of some importance in her grandfather's house, and an object of engrossing interest to the few loving hearts to whom her presence was ever as a ray of sunshine in a shady place.

But since her mother's death (Rosamond might have named an earlier date), a change had gradually been working; and the influence which she had so long unconsciously and meekly held over the old man was gradually and visibly declining.

There was no anger in Rosamond's heart as the conviction strengthened within her that her sceptre had been taken from her and was passing into the hands of her cousins. But though there was no anger, yet a certain half-jealous, half-bitter feeling stole over her as she reflected on the past, and contrasted it with the isolation of the present. What was she now in the home which had once been to her as a little kingdom of tender, loving subjects? There were other

rulers risen up amongst them—rulers over that kind old man, whose age would place him bound and powerless in their hands; while, as for her—the poor, pale cypher (she was pale enough now, as she stood before her glass, her riding-habit removed, and her long brown hair falling over her white and graceful shoulders)—what was there left remaining? The lingering affection of an octogenarian, whose feelings were becoming dulled and deadened by Time's effacing fingers, and the unacknowledged love of the distant, not-to-be-named grandfather, whose very relationship was a disgrace!

"You will be very late, Miss Rosamond, I'm afraid," said Holland, the young-ladies' maid, with whom dress was, probably, a more important object than the affections; "and Colonel Fendall has sent up to ask whether you would like your dinner up here."

Her dinner sent up there! Another proof of how little her society was needed!—another proof that, in that house, others were assuming the right to exercise the duties of hospitality!

She stooped down to hide the tears which at this reflection gathered in her eyes; and Mrs. Holland, whose appetite for her supper was sharpened by delay, began to think that the

toilette of Miss Rosamond had never occupied so long a time before. The truth was, that her young mistress had at that moment many an interesting recollection, besides those connected with her own household, to dwell upon ; for Percy Elliot's face gleamed lustroously through the surrounding gloom, and Rosamond, as she slowly descended the stairs, felt that, cold as might be towards her the hearts of those whose affection she would so gladly have retained, a comfort yet remained to her in the memory of her life-long obligation to Percy Elliot.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AUNT MARY TELLS HOME NEWS.

ROSAMOND'S account of her adventures did not appear likely to produce anything approaching to the effect which she had anticipated, for by the time she made her appearance in the drawing-room, where tea according to her request had been prepared for her, Sir Matthew was dozing in his chair beside the fire, and Myles was whispering what seemed to be very important communications in Rica's ear.

The often recurring confidential *asides* which took place between her cousins, were a source of considerable discomfort to Rosamond. They were for ever making her feel herself *de trop*, and in the way; besides, being herself very courteous and well-bred, she could not but condemn them as displaying an absence of *savoir vivre*, which shocked the delicacy of her taste.

The truth was that both Colonel Fendall and his sister were very much engrossed by the dis-

agreeable scene which on that afternoon had taken place in the Square. Myles had to a certain degree attempted to conceal the lowness of his mother's origin from Rica. He had spoken of his parentage as obscure, but at the same time he had thrown out hints of his mother having belonged to a family which had "gone down in the world," and had dwelt on the fact, that of blood relations there only now remained the rich Aunt Mary, who had on that day put in such an unexpected appearance on the Brighton stage.

And now Rica had seen this specimen of Colonel Fendall's trump-cards, it could not be denied that she had received from Myles' description a general impression of Aunt Mary, which was strongly at variance with the reality. A mild, elegant-looking single lady, with grey hair parted beneath a pretty suitable cap; a neat brougham, in which she daily took her dowager airing; and a considerable landed estate which would eventually be her nephew's; such was the Mrs. Mary Hannum who had been associated in Rica's imagination with her darling brother's respectable relation.

She had been considerably shocked by the revelation of the truth. Her fear of ridicule for

herself and Myles had been roused, and she felt more than half-angry with him for the deception he had practised.

A very lame account of the lengthened visit which he had paid his aunt, did Colonel Fendall vouchsafe to give to his investigating sister. Could she have been an unsuspected listener and looker-on during that visit's continuance, she would have considered herself still more infamously treated, and would have indignantly resented the false light which Myles had hitherto thrown upon his family connections.

Colonel Fendall had found himself compelled, though sorely against his will, to escort his relations to their hotel. He had no other resource. It would have been impossible to shake Aunt Mary off; although at that moment Myles would have done so with no more remorse than was felt by the master spirit who, in the boat heavy laden with shipwrecked mariners, chopped off the clinging fingers of the drowning man, whose added weight would have sunk them in the raging sea.

But Myles had no such alternative in the case of the Aunt Mary, whose thick fingers, encased in strong knitted worsted gloves, clung energetically to his arm, and whose feeble brother, clad

in useful homespun, and with a fur cap of large dimensions on his head, stared into his nephew's face with an air of wondering imbecility.

So Myles, putting the best face he could upon the matter, walked away with his incongruous companions to the Ship Hotel, it being an arduous time of trial, for Aunt Mary, uninvited, took his arm, and he had only to trust to his good fortune that none of his acquaintances would see him in a position so degrading.

At last they reached the "Ship," and Mrs. Mary, proud of the hospitality she was about to offer, preceded her nephew up the stairs and into her private sitting-room.

"Pretty place, ain't it, my dear?" she said, sitting down heavily on the old sofa, which fairly creaked beneath her thirteen stone of weight, and fanning herself with her velvet bonnet, for the sun was warm, and Myles had walked them along with unusual rapidity. "Take off your cap, Joseph. It's so very warm, that you'll be getting one of your bad headaches. He doesn't hear. Myles, my dear, take off your uncle's cap, will you? and then he will like to hear all about the Rooshians, and the fighting. Won't you, Joseph?"

But Joseph seemed to care as little for details

of battles as his nephew did for the office which had been assigned to him—namely, that of uncovering Uncle Joseph's large ears and removing the fur cap which impeded his auditory organs.

Aunt Mary was, however, too busy to notice the failure of her plans; for the noisy waiter had brought in the luncheon she had ordered, and all her faculties were concentrated in the performance of the sacred rites before her.

"My dear," she said to the Colonel, "you'll take a little ham, I'm sure. It isn't like the Broadlands hams, of course; but it eats pretty short, too. We had some for breakfast—Joseph and I; and the Cheshire ain't bad, neither. Why, you eat nothing, Myles! Ah! I wish I had you at Broadlands, among the cream cheeses and the home-cured; but that's to come. And after so many years!—why, Myles, it must be five and more since we have seen you! and wouldn't now, most likely, only that Joseph and I came to Brighton to see a cousin of his. His mother's friends was coast-people, you know."

Colonel Fendall did not know, or care. His uncle Joseph filled him with unmitigated disgust; and as for any relation he might have a

right to claim in that large town, why the longer she remained in ignorance of his whereabouts the better.

Aunt Mary's own feelings were of so warm a temperature, and her disposition so completely unsuspecting, that she had never attributed any instance of Myles' neglect of herself to its true cause. He had been absent—he was always otherwise engaged—his letters had miscarried, or he might be dead and buried; anything but the true cause—namely, that he had grown proud and heartless—had been urged by Aunt Mary as excuses for her nephew's neglect and coldness.

But ready as the worthy woman was to assign other motives in his excuse, there were bounds even to the charity which in Aunt Mary's ample bosom thought "no evil;" and Colonel Fendall's silence under her well-meant flow of words was beginning to raise some unpleasant misgivings in her mind, when he, suddenly recollecting the value of the Broadlands lease, to say nothing of certain savings which might be fairly reckoned on after thirty years of thrifty and not unskilful management, drew his chair towards the fire with the evident intention of making himself agreeable.

Uncle Joseph, who was, as the reader may have guessed, the big-headed and not over intellectual youngest son of the unfortunate and guilty gardener, was disposed of at the window, from which place of observation he was never tired of gazing. Everything he saw was a subject for wonder and admiration to the country-bred man, who at sixty was little more than a child in mind. He delighted in the sight of the carriages, and in the sound of their advancing and retreating wheels. The gallop of the horses and the aspect of the gay dragoons, were sources of endless pleasure; while the sea, and the sailing-boats thereon, were watched by the harmless and easily-amused Uncle Joseph with an all-absorbing interest.

"There, my dear," said Aunt Mary, as she settled him in a comfortable arm-chair before the open sash. "There; now you stay quiet a bit while Myles and I have a talk. I'll tell you if he says anything about battles. He's very fond of battles is your uncle Joseph," turning to Myles, "though it isn't much he knows of them, poor man!"

"He's looking very well," remarked Colonel Fendall, who felt called upon to make some

complimentary observation concerning his relation.

"Well, I think he is," rejoined Joseph's attentive sister; "and I'm very glad, my dear, to have your opinion of him. He was a little ailing in the autumn with the rheumatism, but Doctor Henderson brought him round. He was some time though before he was quite himself, and he had to take as many as three boxes of his colchicum pills. You know Dr. Henderson's pills, my dear?"

Colonel Fendall professed ignorance of that celebrated medicine, and Aunt Mary went on with her domestic budget of news.

"It's rather hard at all times to give a pill to Uncle Joseph. However, we haven't much to complain of" (looking towards him affectionately). "And Myles, my dear, now I think of it, it is just as well that you should have the prescription of the pills. You don't look much like rheumatism at present; but, as it's in the family, you know one's never sure."

In the family! Colonel Fendall positively started with horror at the words. Gracious Heaven! To think that he, Myles Fendall, who held himself so high, had in his veins the same polluted and ignoble liquid which helped

to make that dreadful Uncle Joseph the degraded *thing* he seemed ! He could not pursue the subject ; but thanking Aunt Mary with some coldness for her kind intentions, he abruptly changed the subject by asking her how long she had been at Brighton.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MYLES SHOWS TEMPER.

“Not four-and-twenty hours, my dear,” replied Aunt Mary; “and I’ve already heard a piece of news——”

“Brighton is a great place for that commodity,” remarked her nephew.

Aunt Mary touched him playfully on the side.

“None of your fun just now, my dear,” she said, with an arch and meaning look; “for it’s news that you have something to do with. I’ll give you three guesses, now, and you won’t know what it is.”

“I never guessed anything in my life,” said Myles, languidly.

“Didn’t you now, my dear? Well, that’s very strange. I have often made very clever guesses, and so has Sarah Jinnings. You recollect old Sarah Jinnings;—not that she’s so very old either: let me see, she was born in the year——Well, I don’t exactly remember, and

it doesn't much signify. However, as I was saying, Sarah Jinnings often steps up to take a cup of tea at Broadlands, and—"

"Well, but Aunt Mary," broke in Myles, with an impatience which delighted Mrs. Hannum; "how about your news? If I am to guess it, I must be quick, for—"

"Now don't you be talking of going yet awhile. I haven't seen you this five year, and I'm not going to be put off with one of your fashionable calls. But about the news, which I must tell you I heard from Joseph's mother's cousin there,—she keeps one of the grand lodging-houses on the cliff, and makes a power of money—how's more than I can say, and I know a little about housekeeping, I flatter myself."

"But about the news?" persevered Myles, who began to fear that the evening would close in before Mrs. Hannum had disburthened her mind of its secret.

"The news? Well, my dear, you must know that, as I said before, Mrs. Goodwin keeps one of the best lodging-houses in the town. You won't have a little bit more of the ham now, will you, Myles? Just a mouthful. It isn't like a Broadlands ham, I know. You won't? Well,

is there anything else you would fancy? A nice done chop, or—”

“Nothing, thank you, my dear aunt,” replied the Colonel, who had taken his fill of turtle-soup at “Mutton’s,” not an hour before. “Nothing, thank you. I think I know Mrs. Goodwin’s lodging-house; facing the sea is it not? grey brick, with Venetian blinds?”

He had made a series of good guesses, and, what was of far more importance, had brought back Aunt Mary to the point.

“That’s the very house!” she cried exultingly; “and as Mrs. Goodwin is a decent body enough, and very civil-spoken, Uncle Joseph and I took our tea with her last night. She had a Sally Lunn for us, and two muffins. I was rather afraid, for Uncle Joseph has got a weak stomach of his own, but he seems none the worse of it to-day.”

Colonel Fendall groaned inwardly. To be subjected to the annoyance of a dissertation on Uncle Joseph’s digestive powers was almost as great a trial as that which Aunt Mary’s public recognition of him had recently inflicted, and he was considering by what means he could put a speedy end to the annoyance, when Aunt

Mary plunged at once, and quite unexpectedly, into the very heart of her subject.

"It seems," she said, "from what Mrs. Goodwin told us, that the place is full of tip-top company. Such a many stories as she had to tell, to be sure! Some true, and more false, I daresay. And, deary me, Myles, if the 'quality' be so bad as they say, why, it isn't much to be wondered at if poor people's bad too. It was as good as a play, though, to listen, for Mrs. Goodwin is very good company; and when she got at last to Sir Matthew Fendall and the two young ladies, why I did prick up ears, as you may guess."

"And pray what might your friend have to say of them?" asked Myles, in a tone of mingled curiosity and contempt.

"Something that *will* surprise you a little, I'm thinking," replied Aunt Mary; "for it was neither more nor less than that you, my dear, were making up to the heiress, and that there wasn't a doubt, so folks said, but that you and Miss Rosamond would come together."

"Stuff and rubbish!" exclaimed Fendall, angrily.

"So I thought—not but what stranger things have been; only Sir Matthew, of course, wouldn't

allow of such a match, and he wouldn't be best pleased, perhaps, to hear it talked of."

Myles thought for a moment, and then said—

"I wonder why people make so sure that Miss Rosamond Fendall is to be the heiress of Hazel Combe. For my part, I think it would be the height of injustice to pass over my father's son and daughter. My father was Sir Matthew's elder son, and it will be most unfair if any underhand dealings should cause our rights to be interfered with."

He was rapidly talking himself into a passion, the while Aunt Mary looked at and listened to him in amazement.

"One would think, to hear you talk, my dear," she said at last, "that you have forgotten——"

"I have forgotten nothing," he broke in passionately; "and all that I have the misfortune to remember only proves to me that it is my grandfather's duty to make amends to me for that in which—God knows—I had no share. *I* am not guilty of my own unlucky birth. *His* son is the one to blame, and *he*, perhaps, originally, for some confounded bringing up—which caused it all. *I* should never have got into such a scrape as that; and you must own,

Aunt Mary, that it will be rather hard to punish me for other people's selfishness."

"Yes, but one never heard——" began Aunt Mary.

"Never heard of an illegitimate son succeeding to a family estate," said Myles, bitterly. "Well, I grant you that it isn't common. But, whether Sir Matthew behaves like a gentleman to me or not, one thing is certain, and that is, that my Uncle John's daughter has no more right to Hazel Combe than you or I."

"They say she's an uncommon nice young lady, and a favourite with high and low. Is she pretty, too, my dear, as well as good?"

"Pretty enough, for that matter," answered Myles; and then, after a pause, "What made you say, Aunt Mary, that Sir Matthew would never consent to my marriage with his granddaughter?"

"Lor, Myles—don't you know? Surely he wouldn't be willing to give his heiress, his pretty Miss Rosamond, to the grandson of the poor man who——"

"Who what?" asked Fendall, impatiently.

"Why, surely I hadn't need to tell you what I mean."

"Speak out," cried Colonel Fendall, with in-

creasing irritation. "What about the man you call my grandfather? Gad! It's too disgusting," he continued, for he was too angry to be prudent, "these relations turning up at every corner, and all this beastly mystery about them too."

"*Beastly* do you call it?" rejoined Aunt Mary, who was now growing angry in turn, "Well, maybe it's the right word, though it's not for you to say it. You forget, Master Myles, that you're speaking of my poor father—my father, who was a happy and a prosperous man till *yours* brought shame and ruin on his family. You forget the dreadful end your uncle came to, and all along of one man's fault; and he was a 'gentleman,' if you please, not a 'disgusting poor relation,' with a 'beastly mystery about him.' Oh no!—you can be proud of *his* belongings, while your mother's friends are much too low for a fine gentleman like Colonel Fendall to notice, or to care for."

Myles felt, whilst listening to this indignant tirade, that his temper had led him into an indiscretion, and was thinking how best to retrace the ground he had lost, when Aunt Mary, whose ire had not half effervesced, continued her remarks upon his conduct.

"I wouldn't have thought it of you, Myles;

you as was was such a nice little fellow—so biddable to your Aunt Mary, and so handy as you used to be about the house, and willing.”

Fendall could have groaned again at these reminiscences of his childhood, but with them came also a kind of softening influence which checked the angry evidence of feeling, and turned the groan into a sigh. He could remember so many happy days spent with Aunt Mary, both at the “Upper Farm,” and at the more extensive and important one of “Broadlands.” Such haymaking in the meadows, when the waggons swayed beneath their heavy loads, and he, the happiest of the happy, “rode” on the summit of the fragrant heap, looking down from his exalted place on the less favoured mortals far below. And then there was the birdnesting in the woods, and the blackberry feasts formed of his own gathered fruits, and which were concocted by the old cook Judith into a pudding, the like of which Myles had never partaken of before or since ; and last, though by no means the least of his enjoyments, there was the pressing into his hand at parting of a bright golden half-sovereign, which Aunt Mary bade him take good care of, telling him to be a good boy, and not spend too much of it at once.

With so many instances of the excellent woman's past kindness to dwell upon, it is scarcely surprising that Myles, world-hardened though he was, and taking into consideration that there was no one present to ridicule his absurdity, should have expressed contrition for what he called his involuntary offence.

"I am very sorry, dear Aunt Mary," he said, in tones which he endeavoured with some success to render faltering—"very sorry to have pained you. Believe me, it was wholly without intention. I have had so much to irritate me of late, and your words implied so much. When a man's feelings are interested, you know, he is not always master of himself."

Aunt Mary's kind heart was softened at once, for were not 'her nephew's' words almost conclusive as to the interesting fact that he was in love with that pretty, sweet Miss Rosamond, the fame of whose good gifts had reached as far as Broadlands Farm, and whose great heiress-ship had invested her with an importance which Mrs. Mary was fully capable of appreciating.

But with all her wish for her nephew's happiness and worldly advancement, she could not conceal from herself, nor did she feel justified in hiding from him, the insuperable obstacles which

lay in his path; and a sigh full of regretful meaning escaped her as she thought on the sorrow and disappointment which awaited him.

She was pondering thus sadly on the past, when Myles, with an abruptness which took her by surprise, exclaimed, "Aunt Mary, you know more of these family matters than I do—more than you like to talk of, perhaps, but not more than I insist on having revealed to me—not more than, in common justice, you should conceal from me any longer."

"But, my dear," began Aunt Mary, hesitatingly, "I don't know that there is anything—at least anything but what it would pain you as much to hear as for me to talk about. It's many a day now since all the trouble was; and really, Myles, you'd best not concern yourself with matters which I'd as lief was forgotten by us all."

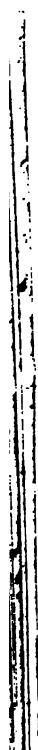
But Myles would not be put off with arguments which served but as stimulants to his curiosity. Again he urged Aunt Mary to initiate him into the mystery which he had just before spoken of with such loathing; and the worthy woman, yielding at last to his importunities, and to her own talkative tendencies, gave herself up to the somewhat morbid pleasure of detail-

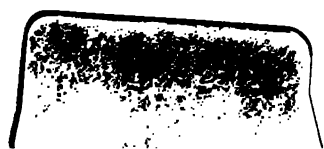
ing the never-to-be-forgotten horrors of the past.

Uncle Joseph still retained his seat beside the window, his deaf ear turned towards them, and his eyes fixed upon the moving throng which continued to pass and repass along the crowded Cliff.

END OF VOL. II.











the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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